

SEPTEMBER 11, 2006

# The American Conservative

## Who Won? Not the U.S.

### ISLAM'S WAY OF WAR

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### EXCESSIVE—OR NOT ENOUGH?

Martin van Creveld



## SPIN-FREE ZONE

Your issue concerning the terms “liberal” and “conservative” (Aug. 28) is one of the most refreshing pieces of political discussion I have read in some time. *TAC* as a whole usually fits this bill, but this issue especially hits the bull’s-eye.

I am so tired of reading the partisan spinners spewing their venom and propaganda that is to be consumed as though it contained thoughtful ideas. The *Weekly Standards* and *Nations* of the world offer little substance in the realm of intellectual political debate.

The fact that *The American Conservative* can stand up to the Republican political machine and say, “What you are doing is not conservative and here’s why,” says much about the integrity and honesty of the *TAC* staff. I have no doubt that if more people were exposed to the content of *TAC*, other so-called political journals would be exposed as the PR campaigns they are.

ERIK TUCKER

*Allendale, Mich.*

## NO ATHEIST PURGE

One attorney general, one article in 1991, and a president who echoes the Declaration of Independence. Sounds like a religious tidal wave to me.

Heather Mac Donald sounds like she graduated from the Howard Dean School of Religious History with an advanced degree (Aug. 28). Her understanding of faith, prayer, and God in this article is simplistic, reductionist, and to be frank, ignorant. All that is missing is that religious conservatives are “largely poor, uneducated, and easy to command.”

Guilt by association is standard for the faithophobic who smear today’s Christians because some people twisted the Bible to support their culture. How can I respond? Communists are avowedly secular. How about I match Ms. Mac Donald’s southern slave-owners with Stalin, Mao, Castro, Pol Pot, and Chavez?

Now I don’t believe that all or even a significant minority of atheists, agnos-

tics, and secularists share these viewpoints. This, however, is because I believe that those who are different than I can be a valuable and positive part of the discussion. Ms. Mac Donald does not communicate this in her screed against those religious folks bound by their contradictory thinking.

I welcome the skeptical conservatives and their contributions to the movement and the party. However, it seems that Ms. Mac Donald has followed the leftist logic of stereotypes when it comes to Christians.

There is no purge of secular thinking on the Right or in the Republican Party. It seems that the two leading contenders for the Republican nomination are Rudy Giuliani and John McCain. While one may question their conservative credentials, I do not think either of them is a part of this supposed religious triumphalism. There is room for the faithful and the skeptical in the conservative movement that I belong to. I wonder if there is in Ms. Mac Donald’s.

DARRELL FRANKLIN

*Valparaiso, Ind.*

## IRRELIGIOUS RIGHT

Finally, somebody gets it right. Heather Mac Donald hit the nail on the head and slammed it home. She was talking about me and small groups of atheists who are staunch conservatives. We really are out there, though it may be politically incorrect to acknowledge us.

BOB CLARK

*Corpus Christi, Texas*

P.S. Though Corpus Christi means Body of Christ, I am not in favor of changing the name.

## REQUIRED READING

Let this letter serve as my personal standing ovation to *TAC* for your Aug. 28 edition. I had cancelled my subscription, along with several other political publications, out of personal frustration with the American body politic. Several recent events rekindled my appetite for the views expressed in your magazine.

My first issue back in the fold was *TAC*’s taking of the American political pulse. The collection of views contained therein serve as a sobering reminder of the arbitrary nature of political labels and of how far we have devolved from the principles of government upon which this nation was founded. The issue should be bound and placed in the required reading list of both major parties’ resident ideologues. The American people would be well served. Brilliant stuff.

ERIC J. SMITH

*Bloomfield Hills, Mich.*

## SILENT MAJORITY

The last issue of *TAC* was an insightful reflection of what conservative, libertarian, and just plain thoughtful people are thinking about the current state of political affairs in this country.

The disaster labeled the Bush administration seems obvious to everyone, as does the paucity of Democratic response. (Ned Lamont in his victory speech over Joseph Lieberman immediately insisted that he would back universal health care for Americans. Does he know why he defeated Lieberman?)

Given the hopelessness of both major parties and the overwhelming importance of the foreign-policy issue, isn’t it time now to be organizing a coalition third party around some kind of conservative icon—a party that would make the case for getting all U.S. troops out of all foreign countries now? Such a party would certainly represent a majority of voters.

RICHARD TIMBERLAKE

*via e-mail*

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REUTERS PHOTO ARCHIVE

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## [TERROR]

### WAR ON TOOTHPASTE

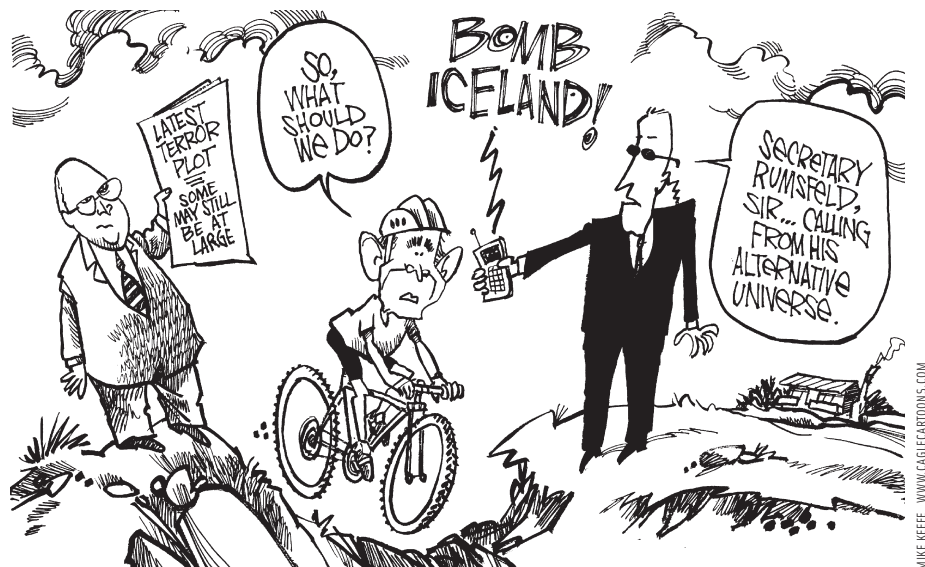
Thank God for British intelligence, able to foil a horrendous plot that could have blown up several commercial airliners and killed thousands. Their success underscores a point lost on the American administration: effective law enforcement, not massive military intervention, is the most effective means of combating terrorism.

More about the plans and the plotters—apparently British-born Pakistanis—will emerge in the months ahead. Even if no more than 1 in 10,000 British Muslims is amenable to terrorist activity, that would pose considerable risk to Britain's security and our own.

The plot also raises the vexing issue of profiling. Clearly the discovery of the scheme further gummed up the airline system: in the aftermath, lines at Newark's airport stretched 600 yards and scores of planes took off from London half-empty because many travelers couldn't get through security in time. Because of disaffected Muslims, your grandmother and mine are barred from taking make-up and shampoo in their carry-ons and millions will suffer massive delays.

For the most part Americans have been good sports about post-Sept. 11 security measures. But as Heather Mac Donald bluntly put it on *National Review Online*, "if President Bush believes we are at war with 'Islamic fascists' his security policies should stop treating every American like the enemy."

American security resources are finite. It is bad enough that the Bush administration has been pouring them into Iraq instead of disseminating the kind of technological tools that could distinguish between toothpaste and the makings of a bomb. But must it continue to pretend that 75-year-old Christian matrons are every bit as dangerous as young Muslim men? If the administration persists in that enormous waste of



time and resources, it signals that the security rules are intended more for show and to frighten Americans than they are to deal with any real danger.

## [IRAQ]

### CAN WE WIN THEIR CIVIL WAR?

Almost forgotten in the midst of the turmoil of the Lebanon war and the London airliner scare is the ongoing mess in Iraq. Earlier this month the Pentagon's top Iraq generals laid out the bad news before the Senate Armed Services Committee: Iraq is on the verge of devolving into civil war. Countering the Bush/GOP line that things in Iraq are better every day—or if that is no longer believable, that we are "adapting to win"—Gen. John Abizaid testified that sectarian violence in Iraq was as bad as he had ever seen it. July proved the bloodiest month to date for civilian deaths. Moreover, the committee met amidst reports that two-thirds of U.S. Army units are unprepared for combat because of the strain of the Iraq deployment.

And the Iraq mission is now what, exactly? If the country has begun to slide to civil war, breaking up into ethnic cantons, what is the role of the American mission? Clearly enabling a less bloodsoaked partition could be better accomplished by a UN force, or indeed almost any non-American one.

But as Harold Meyerson acutely pointed out, a resolution to simply minimize the bloodshed would be deeply embarrassing to the administration that launched the war on false pretenses. "It's not true they don't have a plan for Iraq. Their plan is to avoid having such a resolution on their watch, to delay the disintegration ... until Bush is out of office and they can lay the blame for this catastrophe on his successor."

It is dispiriting to think of a president so completely selfish about the expenditure of American lives and treasure. But sad as it is to acknowledge, Meyerson is probably correct: no one high in the U.S. government really believes in the Iraq mission anymore, they believe only in saving their political skins, evading the consequences for their folly, calling the Democrats the party of cut-and-run, and hoping that turns out the Republican base in this year's elections. For that goal, young Americans will be killed.

## [IMMIGRATION]

### PENCE'S AMNESTY

So far the House has successfully held the line against the Senate's invite-the-world immigration bill, but the cheap-labor lobby hasn't given up just yet. When Congress comes back to town, expect a last-ditch effort to transform illegal aliens into guest workers, this time according to legislation by Con-

gressman Mike Pence (R-Ind.) and Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas). The two maintain their plan isn't an amnesty, as we've been told about every amnesty proposal before.

Pence is a respected conservative who claims to support enforcement first, but his House Republican colleagues shouldn't be fooled. His guest-worker plan is open to all illegal immigrants. All they need to do to have their status "adjusted" is to take a trip to Mexico and pay an application fee, no other penalties involved. Families of guest workers can come along for the ride. The bill allows market demand—i.e., corporate pressure—to determine guest-worker levels and outsources the vetting process to private agencies.

No punishment for illegal immigrants, Big Business driving immigration policy, and the large-scale importation of low-skilled foreign workers? The Pence plan isn't a compromise—it's an attempt to dress up the status quo.

#### [BUREAUCRACY] **BABYING WAL-MART**

Call it the world's biggest small business: according to the Bush administration, Wal-Mart—the largest corporation on the planet—belongs in the same category as the mom-and-pop convenience store, the local diner, and the kids' lemonade stand. So does Home Depot, along with media giants Gannett and the New York Times Company, small businesses all—at least for purposes of federal contracting.

By counting behemoths as small fry, the administration "inflated [its] record of help to small companies," according to the Associated Press, which itself received "five small business contracts valued at \$31,600" for services rendered to the Coast Guard, State Department, and Department of Defense. In all, "about \$12 billion in contracts to big companies were cited as going to small

businesses"—an infinitesimal sum to Big Government, to be sure. Indeed, perhaps this was an honest mistake: from the towering heights of the most spend-thrift administration since Lyndon Johnson, even Gannett, Home Depot, and Wal-Mart might look Lilliputian.

#### [TRADE] **NAFTA BOULEVARD**

"Family values don't stop at the Rio Grande," according to our open-borders enthusiast of a president. Neither, if he has his way, will countless containers of unchecked cargo.

Twelve years in, the NAFTA tally is plain: jobs go south while drugs flow north, lowered environmental standards and increased trade deficits, yet the Bush administration's border blurring continues. Without public fanfare—much less debate—work will begin next year on a ten-lane superhighway stretching from Laredo, Texas to Duluth, Minnesota. Any inclined to dismiss this as just so much asphalt should note the Chinese reaction: they're investing millions in Mexico's deep-water ports, from which to move a flood of goods through the new NAFTA corridor. If all goes according to plan, trucks coming in from Mexico will enter through designated fast lanes where they will be screened electronically but won't encounter a physical checkpoint until Kansas City.

Just as the European Common Market laid the foundation for the European Union, so too is NAFTA an economic pact that envisions political integration. Consider the placement of that Midwest customs station, a continental rather than a border-based location.

A North American Union may be some years off, but its proponents are certainly making inroads—with the complicity of an administration unconcerned about safeguarding American sovereignty. ■

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# Fascists Under the Bed

“President Likens Dewey to Hitler as Fascist Tool.” So ran the *New York Times* headline, Oct. 26, 1948, after what Dewey biographer Richard Norton Smith

called a “particularly vitriolic attack in Chicago” by Harry Truman.

What brings this to mind is President Bush’s assertion that we are “at war with Islamic fascism” and “Islamofascism.”

After the transatlantic bomb plot was smashed, Bush said the plotters “try to spread their jihadist message—a message I call, it’s totalitarian in nature—Islamic radicalism, Islamic fascism, they try to spread it as well by taking the attack to those of us who love freedom.”

What is wrong with the term Islamofascism?

First, there is no consensus as to what “fascism” even means. Orwell said when someone calls Smith a fascist, what he means is, “I hate Smith.” By calling Smith a fascist, you force Smith to deny he’s a sympathizer of Hitler and Mussolini.

As a concept, writes Arnold Beichman of the Hoover Institution, “fascism ... has no intellectual basis; its founders did not even pretend to have any. Hitler’s ravings in *Mein Kampf* ... Mussolini’s boastful balcony speeches, all can be described, in the words of Roger Scruton, as ‘an amalgam of disparate conceptions.’”

Richard Pipes considers Stalinism and Hitlerism to be siblings of the same birth mother: “Bolshevism and fascism were heresies of socialism.”

Since the 1930s, “fascist” has been a term of hate and abuse used by the Left against the Right, as in the Harry Truman campaign. In 1964, Martin Luther King Jr. claimed to see in the Goldwater campaign “dangerous signs of Hitlerism.” Twin the words, “Reagan, fascism” in Google and 1,800,000 references pop up.

Unsurprisingly, it is neoconservatives, whose roots are in the Trotskyist-Social Democratic Left, who are promoting use of the term. Their goal is to have Bush stuff al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran into an “Islamofascist” kill box, then let SAC do the rest.

The term represents the same lazy, shallow thinking that got us into Iraq, where Americans were persuaded that by dumping over Saddam, we were avenging 9/11.

But Saddam was about as devout a practitioner of Islam as his idol Stalin was of the Russian Orthodox faith. Saddam was into booze, mistresses, movies, monuments, palaces, and dynasty. Bin Laden loathed him and volunteered to fight him in 1991, if Saudi Arabia would only not bring the Americans in to do the fighting Islamic warriors ought to be doing themselves.

And whatever “Islamofascism” means, Syria surely is not it. It is a secular dictatorship Bush I bribed into becoming an ally in the Gulf War. The Muslim Brotherhood is outlawed in Syria. In 1982, Hafez al-Assad perpetrated a massacre of the Brotherhood in the city of Hama that was awesome in its magnitude and horror.

As with Khaddafi, whom Bush let out of the penalty box after he agreed to pay \$10 million to the family of each victim of Pan Am 103 and give up his nuclear program, America can deal with Syria, as Israel did after the Yom Kippur War—for an armistice on the Golan has stuck, as both sides have kept the deal.

America faces a variety of adversaries, enemies, and evils. But the Bombs-Away

Caucus, as Iraq and Lebanon reveal, does not always have the right formula. Al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran all present separate challenges calling forth different responses.

Al-Qaeda appears to exist for one purpose: plot and perpetrate mass murder to terrorize Americans and Europeans into getting out of the Islamic world. Contrary to what Bush believes, the 9/11 killers and London and Madrid bombers were not out to repeal the Bill of Rights, if any ever read it. They are out to kill us and we have to get them first.

Hamas and Hezbollah have used terrorism, but like Begin’s Irgun and Mandela’s ANC, they have social and political agendas that require state power to implement. And once a guerrilla/terrorist movement takes over a state, it acquires state assets and interests that are then vulnerable to the U.S. military and economic power.

Why did the Ayatollah let the American hostages go, as Reagan raised his right hand to take the oath? Why has Syria not come to the rescue of Hezbollah? Why has Ahmadinejad not rocketed Tel Aviv in solidarity with his embattled allies in Lebanon? *Res ipsa loquitur*. The thing speaks for itself. They don’t want war with Israel; they don’t want war with the United States.

“Islamofascism” should be jettisoned from Bush’s vocabulary. It yokes the faith of a billion people with an odious ideology. Imagine how Christians would have reacted had FDR taken to declaring Franco’s Spain and Mussolini’s Italy “Christo-fascist.”

If Mr. Bush does not want a war of civilizations, he will drop these propaganda terms that are designed to inflame passions rather than inform the public of the nature of the war we are in. ■

# The Islamic Way of War

Muslims have stopped fighting on Western terms—and have started winning.

By **Andrew J. Bacevich**

IN IRAQ, the world's only superpower finds itself mired in a conflict that it cannot win. History's mightiest military has been unable to defeat an enemy force of perhaps 20,000 to 30,000 insurgents equipped with post-World War II vintage assault rifles and anti-tank weapons.

In Gaza and southern Lebanon, the Middle East's mightiest military also finds itself locked in combat with adversaries that it cannot defeat. Despite weeks of bitter fighting, the IDF's Merkava tanks, F16 fighter-bombers, and missile-launching unmanned aerial vehicles failed to suppress, much less eliminate, the armed resistance of Hamas and Hezbollah.

What are we to make of this? How is it that the seemingly weak and primitive are able to frustrate modern armies only recently viewed as all but invincible? What do the parallel tribulations—and embarrassments—of the United States and Israel have to tell us about war and politics in the 21st century? In short, what's going on here?

The answer to that question is disarmingly simple: the sun has set on the age of unquestioned Western military dominance. Bluntly, the East has solved the riddle of the Western Way of War. In Baghdad and in Anbar Province at various points on Israel's troubled perimeter, the message is clear: methods that once could be counted on to deliver swift decision no longer work.

For centuries, Western military might underpinned Western political dominion everywhere from Asia to Africa to the

New World. It was not virtue that created the overseas empires of Great Britain, France, Spain, and the other European colonizers; it was firepower, technology, and discipline.

Through much of the last century, nowhere was this Western military preeminence more in evidence than in the Middle East. During World War I, superior power enabled the British and French to topple the Ottomans, carve up the region to suit their own interests, and then rule it like a fiefdom. Until 1945, European machine guns kept restive Arabs under control in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Palestine.

The end of World War II found the Europeans without the will to operate the machine guns and short on the money to pay for them. In the Middle East, Arabs no longer willing to follow instructions issued by London or Paris demanded independence. Eager to claim prestige and respect, these nationalists, Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser foremost among them, saw in the creation of large machine-age armies a shortcut to achieving their goals.

Placing an order for Soviet-bloc armaments in 1955, Nasser began an ill-fated Arab flirtation with Western-style military technique that did not fully end until Saddam Hussein's army collapsed on the outskirts of Baghdad nearly a half-century later. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Arab leaders invested in fleets of tanks, field artillery, and other heavy armaments, which they organized into massive formations supported by costly air forces equipped with supersonic jets.

On the ground, bigger meant better; in the air, speed was thought to signify superiority.

All of these pricy exertions yielded only humiliation and indignity. Israel—a Western implant in the Muslim world—also adopted Western-style military methods but with far greater success, subjecting the Arabs to repeated drubbings. Designed on the Soviet model, the new Arab armies turned out to be ponderous and predictable but with little of the Red Army's capacity to absorb punishment and keep fighting. Taking the best of the German military tradition, the Israel Defense Forces placed a premium on daring, dash, and decentralization as they demonstrated to great effect in 1956, 1967, and 1973.

What was it that made the IDF in its heyday look so good? According to the punch line of an old joke: because they always fought Arabs. In 1991, the Americans finally had their own chance to fight Arabs, and they too looked good, making mincemeat of Saddam Hussein's legions in Operation Desert Storm. In the spring of 2003, the Americans looked good once again, dispatching the remnant of Saddam's army in a short and seemingly decisive campaign. In Washington many concluded that an unstoppable U.S. military machine could provide the leverage necessary to transform the entire region.

The truth is that U.S. forces and the IDF looked good fighting Arabs only as long as Arab political leaders insisted on fighting on Western terms. As long as they persisted in pitting tank against



tank or fighter plane against fighter plane, Arabs were never going to get the better of either the Americans or the Israelis. His stupidity perhaps matched only by his ruthlessness, Saddam may well have been the last Arab leader to figure this out.

Well before Saddam's final defeat, others, less stupid, began to develop alternative means of what they called "resistance." This new Islamic Way of War evolved over a period of decades not only in the Arab world but beyond.

In Afghanistan during the 1980s, the Mujahadeen got things started by bringing to its knees a Soviet army equipped with an arsenal of modern equipment. During the so-called First Intifada, which began in 1987, stone-throwing and Molotov-cocktail-wielding Palestinians gave the IDF conniptions. In 1993, an angry Somali rabble—not an army at all—sent the United States packing. In 2000, the collapse of the Camp David talks produced a Second Intifada, this one persuading the government of Ariel Sharon that Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank was becoming unsustainable. Most spectacularly, in September 2001, al-Qaeda engineered a successful assault on the American homeland, the culmination of a series of attacks that had begun a decade earlier.

First in Afghanistan and then in Iraq, the United States seemed briefly to turn the tables: Western military methods overthrew the Taliban and then made short shrift of Saddam. After the briefest of intervals, however, victory in both places gave way to renewed and protracted fighting. Most recently, in southern Lebanon an intervention that began with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert vowing to destroy Hezbollah has run aground and looks increasingly like an Israeli defeat.

So it turns out that Arabs—or more broadly Muslims—can fight after all. We may surmise that they now realize that

fighting effectively requires that they do so on their own terms rather than mimicking the West. They don't need and don't want tanks and fighter-bombers. What many Westerners dismiss as "terrorism," whether directed against Israelis, Americans, or others in the West, ought to be seen as a panoply of techniques employed to undercut the apparent advantages of high-tech conventional forces. The methods employed do include terrorism—violence targeting civilians for purposes of intimidation—but they also incorporate propaganda, subversion, popular agitation, economic warfare, and hit-and-run attacks on regular forces, either to induce an overreaction or to wear them down. The common theme of those techniques, none of which are new, is this: avoid the enemy's strengths; exploit enemy vulnerabilities.

What are the implications of this new Islamic Way of War? While substantial, they fall well short of being apocalyptic. As Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has correctly—if perhaps a trifle defensively—observed, "Our enemy knows they cannot defeat us in battle." Neither the Muslim world nor certainly the Arab world poses what some like to refer to as "an existential threat" to the United States. Despite overheated claims that the so-called Islamic fascists pose a danger greater than Hitler ever did, the United States is not going to be overrun, even should the forces of al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, Iraqi insurgents, and Shi'ite militias along with Syria and Iran all combine into a unified anti-Crusader coalition. Although Israelis for historical reasons are inclined to believe otherwise, the proximate threat to Israel itself is only marginally greater. Although neither Israel nor the United States can guarantee its citizens "perfect security"—what nation can?—both enjoy ample capabilities for self-defense.

What the Islamic Way of War does mean to both Israel and to the United States is this: the Arabs now possess—and know that they possess—the capacity to deny us victory, especially in any altercation that occurs on their own turf and among their own people. To put it another way, neither Israel nor the United States today possesses anything like the military muscle needed to impose its will on the various governments, nation-states, factions, and political movements that comprise our list of enemies. For politicians in Jerusalem or Washington to persist in pretending otherwise is the sheerest folly.

It's time for Americans to recognize that the enterprise that some neoconservatives refer to as World War IV is unwinnable in a strictly military sense. Indeed, it's past time to re-examine the post-Cold War assumption that military power provides the preferred antidote to any and all complaints that we have with the world beyond our borders.

In the Middle East and more broadly in our relations with the Islamic world, we face difficult and dangerous problems, more than a few of them problems to which we ourselves have contributed. Those problems will become more daunting still, for us and for Israel, should a nation like Iran succeed in acquiring nuclear weapons. But as events in Iraq and now in southern Lebanon make clear, reliance on the sword alone will not provide a solution to those problems. We must be strong and we must be vigilant. But we also need to be smart, and getting smart means ending our infatuation with war and rediscovering the possibilities of politics. ■

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*Andrew J. Bacevich is professor of history and international relations at Boston University. His most recent book, The New American Militarism, is just out in paperback from Oxford University Press.*



# The Enemy of My Enemy

The U.S.-Israeli fixation on Hezbollah and Hamas undermines our pursuit of al-Qaeda.

By Anders Strindberg

FOR THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, the primary bulwarks against the spread of al-Qaeda's brand of Salafi Islamism into Lebanon and the Palestinian territories have been Hezbollah and Hamas, respectively. While it may not fit well with the black-and-white worldview that provides the backdrop for the war against terrorism, the fact is that these two movements have been far more successful at limiting the influence of Salafism within their respective jurisdictions than any of the regional friends and allies of the United States. Even so, as fierce fighting is reducing Lebanon and the Gaza Strip to rubble, the United States has underwritten the Israeli government's policy that any acceptable political solution must entail the military destruction of Hezbollah and Hamas. Consequently, both movements find themselves the principal targets in the war against terrorism.

Given Hezbollah and Hamas's willingness and ability to stem the rising tide of Salafist militancy, targeting these two movements means that the war against terrorism itself threatens to enable the infiltration and entrenchment of al-Qaeda and its fellow travelers in countries so far denied them. The priorities of the administration seem not only to miss the mark in the fight against terrorism but to constitute a grievous strategic error.

The enmity between Hezbollah and Hamas, on the one hand, and the Salafist trend on the other is in part a matter of practical politics. The former two have been well aware that the emergence of al-Qaeda affiliates in either of their

respective territories would serve as a pretext for harsher U.S. and Israeli actions against them and their constituents. Indeed, Israeli military intelligence has repeatedly floated "information" linking Hamas and al-Qaeda with a view to more firmly incorporating Israel's fight against its enemies into the U.S.-led global war on terror.

Moreover, Hezbollah and Hamas are well established political movements that simply do not want to share their local power bases with Islamist groups of a different ideological hue. Yet it is the nature of this ideological difference that is crucial to understanding the depth of their enmity towards the Salafist project.

While Hezbollah/Hamas and al-Qaeda and its affiliates are engaged in what they see as a resistance project, they are not engaged in the same resistance project. The struggles of the former two are territorial, directed against a specific enemy—Israel—and rooted in the needs and aspirations of specific peoples. Through modern institutions these movements aim to empower their constituents, to whom they also stand directly accountable in democratic elections as well as in terms of a more general approval of their actions. Importantly, they form part of, and co-operate within, a pluralistic spectrum of ideologies and creeds within their respective arenas. While it may not sit well with the U.S. public discourse, neither Hezbollah nor Hamas are enemies of the U.S. other than by inferred extension of their enmity with Israel.

In sharp contrast, al-Qaeda's struggle is rooted in Wahhabi theology, the tribal legacies of Saudi Arabia, and the military experiences of Afghanistan, the Balkans, and Somalia. It wages a cosmic war against the impure values of the West and stands accountable to no specific constituency because it limits its struggle to no specific territory. It seeks to create alternatives to the modern institutions "imported" from the West. It rejects, other than on tactical grounds, political and religious pluralism because it views everyone outside the Salafist sphere as infidels or apostates. It is important to understand that even Hezbollah and Hamas are seen as part of this circle of apostates: the former on account of its Shi'a theology, the latter due to its co-operation with Hezbollah and the various secular Palestinian militant groups and movements. Al-Qaeda is a direct sworn enemy of the U.S. and appears to care little for confrontation with Israel. "Otherwise," as one Palestinian official remarked, "the bastards would have driven those planes [on 9/11] into buildings in Israel, not New York and Washington."

Hezbollah, which operates an effective intelligence apparatus, has carefully monitored Salafist movements for the past several years. It has used a combination of carrots and sticks, most often discreetly, to curb the spread of the new ideology among its constituents. Sometimes it has come to blows. For instance, in response to an uprising linked to al-Qaeda affiliates in the northern coastal

town of Tripoli in late 2001, Hezbollah provided intelligence support for a successful joint Syrian and Lebanese army counterterrorist operation.

In the Palestinian refugee camps in southern Lebanon, which are extremely vulnerable to Salafist influence due to the misery and poverty of their inhabitants, Hamas has co-operated with secular Palestinian groups to stem the tide. Here the tension has repeatedly erupted in violence. In the Palestinian territories, Hamas has worked to counteract infiltration chiefly by absorbing the social grievances that constitute the Salafist breeding ground into its own domestic agenda, thereby reducing the need for a more radical movement. Hamas has also exhibited a rock-solid refusal to respond to persistent Salafist requests for “co-operation against common enemies.” “We have no common enemy,” said one Hamas spokesman, “as long as they wage a global struggle and we wage a local one.”

Combating Hezbollah and Hamas is thus an open invitation for Salafists to enter Lebanon and Palestine, serving no discernible American interest in the war against al-Qaeda—supposedly the centerpiece in the war against terrorism. The administration’s crude and dangerous approach to Middle East politics seems entirely shaped by neocon utopianism, fuelled by the politics of vendetta.

When the U.S. put forces in Lebanon in the early 1980s, the loose conglomerate of nascent cells that would later coalesce into Hezbollah struck with lethal force. In two attacks, against the U.S. embassy and the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, over 300 American service personnel were killed. Atrocious as these attacks were, it is important to understand that the Hezbollah of today bears no resemblance—politically, organizationally, or operationally—to the cells that carried out the 1983 attacks. For the past two decades, Hezbollah’s

U.S. and has recently participated in efforts at dialogue mediated by former British foreign service and intelligence officials. The absence of motive combined with the lack of evidence makes it difficult to see accounts of Hezbollah’s “vast international terrorist network”—“the A-team of terrorists” according to former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage—as credible.

The same holds true for Hamas, which has consistently limited its struggle to the Palestinian territories and Israel and has never been found to plan or prepare any kind of attack outside of its local theater of conflict. Elected by a landslide majority in January 2006 to form a new Palestinian government, Hamas ousted a chronically corrupt and incompetent Fatah government, whose sole qualification for the post was its “moderation” and willingness to negotiate with Israel. The Hamas government, by contrast, refused to recognize the existence of Israel—as long as Israel refused to end its occupation of the West Bank, release Palestinian prisoners, and agree to an equitable solution to the six-decade-long Palestinian refugee crisis. This position so galled Israel and the U.S. that the new democratically elected government—one of three in the entire Arab Middle East—was declared an obstacle to peace that needed to be removed.

Only an exact equation of Israeli policy with the U.S. national interest could justify the prominence given by the administration to combating and marginalizing Hezbollah and Hamas. Yet Israeli commentators have recently remarked that the neocons’ apparently instrumental view of Israel is anything but helpful. Daniel Levy writes in the Israeli daily *Ha’aretz* about “the near-perfect symmetry of Israeli and American policy,” but goes on to suggest that “disentangling Israeli interests from the rubble of neocon ‘creative destruction’ in the Middle East has become an urgent challenge for Israeli policy-makers. An

FOR THE PAST 20 YEARS, THERE **HAS BEEN NO EVIDENCE** THAT HEZBOLLAH HAS CONSIDERED **ATTACKING AMERICAN TARGETS**, EITHER IN THE HOMELAND OR ABROAD.

If the U.S. and Israel were able to fulfill the goal of eradicating Hezbollah and Hamas—which, it must be noted, is almost certainly a pipedream—there would be no “acceptable” actor in either Lebanon or the Palestinian territories capable of counteracting Salafism as effectively. Without Hezbollah and Syrian support, the Lebanese army is utterly useless for counterterrorism purposes, while a reconstituted “moderate” Palestinian Authority will be no more effective at combating Salafists than they were at stemming the tide of Hamas’s popularity. As Hezbollah and Hamas find themselves under Israeli siege with U.S. approval, Arab and Israeli intelligence sources warn that Salafists are already moving in to fill the eventual void.

exclusive focus has been its struggle against Israeli occupation. Since Israel’s withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000 (although the continued occupation of the Sheba’a Farms remains a source of tension) Hezbollah’s *raison d’être* has been the almost daily Israeli violations of Lebanese territory.

For the past 20 years, there has been no evidence that Hezbollah has considered attacking American targets, either in the homeland or abroad. Federal law-enforcement officials have admitted that there is no evidence, despite overwhelming investigative efforts, that Hezbollah has ever sought to establish military “ sleeper cells ” in the U.S., and Hezbollah itself has repeatedly stated that it has no interest in attacking the

America that seeks to reshape the region through an unsophisticated mixture of bombs and ballots, devoid of local contextual understanding, alliance-building or redressing of grievances, ultimately undermines both itself and Israel.”

The paradox of the war against terrorism has been placed in sharp focus in the course of ongoing battles in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip. Focusing efforts on Hezbollah and Hamas, the U.S. is being drained of political capital that it sorely needs in the fight against real enemies elsewhere in the region and around the world. The Arabs and Muslims know that Hezbollah and Hamas are not the enemies of the U.S., and their elevation to primary U.S. targets does nothing to ameliorate regional disapproval of the war against terrorism.

Moreover, in terms of making operational headway in the war against al-Qaeda, going after Hezbollah and Hamas militarily is exactly the wrong thing to do. The specific struggles of these two movements did not begin with them but was inherited from previous generations of nationalist and leftist combatants. Destroying or weakening Hezbollah and Hamas without addressing the underlying grievances—occupation, prisoners, refugees—would merely cause the baton to be passed on to the next generation of fighters: the al-Qaeda-affiliated Salafists that are already waiting in the wings. If the Salafists were to proliferate in Lebanon and Palestine, they would be on Israel’s borders and become direct participants in the Arab-Israeli conflict for the first time. Given the U.S. role as primary patron of Israel, al-Qaeda and its allies would thus have gained access to the mother lode of political ammunition with which to justify their global struggle. ■

*Anders Strindberg is an academic and a journalist specializing in Mideast politics.*

### **The United States might be helping cover up Israeli war crimes in Lebanon.**

U.S. Ambassador John Bolton’s blocking of a UN Security Council Resolution that would have condemned Israel’s July 25 killing of four unarmed United Nations observers occurred in spite of the fact that the U.S. government had information that suggested strongly that the killing was both premeditated and deliberate. The National Security Agency (NSA) had intercepted the series of telephone calls made by the observers to the Israeli military liaison confirming that their well-marked position was manned and asking that it not be fired upon. It also had intercepted Israeli communications noting the UN request but ordering that the firing should continue in spite of the fact that there were no Hezbollah nearby and the UN post posed no danger to Israeli troops. The air and artillery attack lasted six hours, until one shell demolished the bunker, killing everyone inside, and the Israelis kept firing as medical personnel struggled to reach the victims. In a confidential briefing to Congress on July 26, an NSA spokesman initially denied that there was any information on the incident but then recanted and admitted that the agency had something, but it was not “definitive.” An infuriated UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, relying on his own office’s report detailing the UN’s 13 separate attempts to convince the Israelis to cease fire, called the killing “apparently deliberate,” a view that was clearly not shared by Bolton, who refused to accept any statement that was in any way critical of Israel. Israel subsequently refused a United Nations request for an independent or joint investigation into the matter. Sources in Washington believe that the killing of the observers might have been carried out to facilitate the obliteration of the nearby village of Khiam by artillery and air strikes. The largely Shi’ite village was a Hezbollah stronghold, but there were also numerous civilians still in the area, many of whom were being killed by the indiscriminate fire. The UN observation post was on high ground overlooking the village and was possibly deliberately targeted so there would be no credible witnesses to the carnage taking place in Khiam.



### **A little-noticed United Nations report produced last month describes an apparent Iranian attempt to illicitly obtain Uranium-238 supplies from mines in the Congo.**

According to the report, a clandestine shipment of the illegally mined ore was intercepted last October by alert customs agents in Tanzania. Ironically, the mines in the Congo, now known as the Lubumbashi mines, were the source of the uranium that was used to create the first two American atomic bombs that were dropped on Japan. The ore that was intercepted was on trucks heading for the port of Dar es Salaam on the Indian Ocean. The uranium was concealed in drums of coltan, a mineral that is used in the manufacture of chips in mobile phones. It was invoiced through to China but was on a ship that was stopping in Bandar Abbas, which appears to have been the actual destination.

*Philip Giraldi, a former CIA Officer, is a partner in Cannistraro Associates.*



# Slow Learners

Five years into the war on terror, Washington is no wiser.

By **Scott McConnell**

Several weeks ago, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, citing as authority an unnamed administration source, tried to put the threat from al-Qaeda into perspective. Compared to the dangers posed by Iran and the surprisingly resilient Hezbollah, Brooks likened bin Laden's group to Europe's early 20th-century anarchists, who wrote furious pamphlets and carried out an occasional assassination. As a threat they hardly compared to the Nazi and Soviet states that arrived later in the century.

What an analogy! Brooks relegated the terrorist network that killed 3,000 Americans to the quaint and musty anti-quarium, shelved alongside romantic grouplets that hatched wild plots against Europe's noblemen. For Brooks, America's real struggle is against "terrorist" Iran and "terrorist" Hezbollah, not al-Qaeda types with no mass support. Brooks and his administration source seemed to be laying out a 2006 version of neoconservative talking points, an upgrade on the thinking that prompted the Bush administration to abort its pursuit of Osama bin Laden in Tora Bora in 2002 and launch a war of "aggression" (in Milton Friedman's apt term) against Iraq, a country that had nothing to do with bin Laden and posed no threat to the United States. In 2006, as in 2002, the threat from real terrorists would be minimized, and the real "terrorist" danger would be deemed to be Mideast states and movements that threatened Israel.

Britain's arrest of 24 Muslims with links to al-Qaeda intent on committing a spectacular mass slaughter in the skies

ought to put into perspective who America's "terrorist" enemies are and who they are not. It is a good point from which to measure what the Washington establishment has learned in the past five years—and what it stubbornly refuses to. During that period, while the United States has failed to kill or capture Osama bin Laden, it has been actively responsible for the destruction of urban life in Baghdad and in recent weeks green-lighted Israel's wrecking of much of Beirut and the rest of Lebanon. Tehran and Damascus, the capitals of two nations that co-operated importantly with Washington in rolling up al-Qaeda cells in the aftermath of bin Laden's attack, now sit at the top of the neoconservative list of "terrorists" the administration is being pressed to target.

One might have thought that the administration's failure to bring bin Laden to justice, and the disaster Bush's policies have wreaked on Iraq and on America's reputation, would have prompted a serious re-evaluation about American Mideast policy. But such rethinking, while evident in the stirrings within the Democratic Party, has barely made a dent. Instead, the administration and its backers, imbued with a double-or-nothing spirit, seek to redeem its failure in Iraq by labeling an even wider swathe of Muslims and Arab Christians as "terrorists." Taking neoconservative rhetoric one step further, the fever swamps of Christian Zionism now push for the killing of tens of millions of Muslims, a task that could only be carried out with nuclear weapons. In terms of a

strategy toward the Muslim world, America is more prone to lash out in ignorance than it was in the fall of 2001.

Washington's response to the crises in Gaza and Lebanon was revealing. The summer war did not begin with Hezbollah's kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers in July, nor with a Palestinian group's capture of an Israeli soldier two weeks earlier. Its roots lie in the slow-motion asphyxiation of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, a long-term goal of the Israeli (and neoconservative) Right, abetted by George W. Bush's uninterest. The administration has acceded to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's plan for an Israeli-dictated "solution" to the Palestinian issue. After Palestinians voted for Hamas—in part a reaction to the lack of any progress toward a negotiated settlement—the Israelis and the Bush administration immediately tried to starve out the newly elected government. Israel stepped up its arrests and "targeted killings" of those it defined as "militants" or "terrorists."

Olmert's "solution" was that the Palestinians should accept as their "state" a series of isolated cantons, with an Israeli security barrier severing Arab towns from Jerusalem, the cantons cut off from one another by Israeli-controlled roads and walled off from the rest of the Middle East by Israeli military bases and checkpoints. This obviously would be rejected by the Palestinians, their fellow Arabs, and the rest of the world. But the Bush administration did nothing to contradict Olmert's notion.

If America was uninterested, the Arab world was not, and unequal combat between Gaza's ill-equipped militias and the Israeli army, which generated scores of civilian Palestinian casualties, was regular fare on satellite dishes throughout the Middle East. The battle provided an emotional backdrop for Hezbollah's raid on Israel's northern border, a symbolic strike against Israeli might that Hassan Nasrallah had every reason to know would be celebrated by Sunni and Shi'ite alike.

After the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers on July 12, the Bush administration announced it would not tell Israel how to defend itself, not even feigning to urge restraint. In what some in the administration saw as a dress rehearsal for an attack on Iran, the infrastructure of Lebanon was soon laid waste by Israeli pilots, as the Pentagon rushed Israel fresh supplies of aviation fuel so the bombing could be stepped up. As more than a quarter of Lebanon's population

expected, to retaliate against Hezbollah positions in Lebanon and then negotiate, or the wider war that was chosen. Israel's peace camp, forthright and courageous in denouncing the government's continued humiliation of the Palestinians, supported Olmert's attack on Lebanon (see Martin van Creveld's piece in this issue), a fact that must be weighed by those who count themselves as non-hostile critics of Israel. But Hezbollah's raid was of a piece with the dozens of border incidents that have plagued Israel since its founding, none of which have escalated into full-scale wars.

Regardless of whether Olmert's strategic bombing offensive was good for Israel or not, what American purpose has been served by the smashing of Lebanon's highways and hospitals, the destruction of its Christian villages along with Muslim ones, the turning of a quarter of the country into refugees? If Lebanon is transformed by American weapons into a failed state, is that good or bad for Amer-

domination" were at war with us, and he urged Israel to "fight, destroy, annihilate and eliminate the threat of Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria—and Iran ..."

Against this, there has been at least some pushback. Sixty percent of Americans believe the Bush policy in Iraq is a failure. There is more muscle in the discourse of antiwar realists and progressives. When Kristol opined on Fox News that the war was a "great opportunity" for America to "begin resuming the offensive" against Iran and Syria, NPR's Juan Williams rebuked him: "Well, it just seems to me that you want ... you just want war, war, war, and you want us in more war. You wanted us in Iraq. Now you wanted us in Iran. Now you want us to get into the Middle East ..." Williams was right, making points that four years ago were never voiced on network news. George Will, now the dean of American conservative commentators, said about Kristol's call for a U.S. strike on Iran, "the most magnificently misnamed neoconservatives are the most radical people in town." Sen. Chuck Hagel gave a speech, courageous by the standards of his party, lamenting Bush's Mideast policy on the floor of the Senate: the U.S., he said, must be seen as fair "by all the states in the Middle East."

These are welcome signs—and the kind of voices that were seldom heard from the establishment in 2001 and 2002. But we'd be foolish to imagine that they are sufficient to stop the drift toward wider war—America and Israel against all Muslims, Shi'ite and Sunni, terrorist, non-terrorist, and anti-terrorist, Syria and Iran and Palestine along with Iraq—the war that treats Palestinians struggling for national dignity and Londonistan Pakistanis who want to blow up airliners as cut from the same cloth, the war yearned for as much by Osama in his cave as it is by *The Weekly Standard*, Newt Gingrich, and the Christian Zionist rapture reverends. ■

## IF LEBANON IS TRANSFORMED BY **AMERICAN WEAPONS INTO A FAILED STATE**, IS THAT GOOD OR BAD FOR **AMERICA'S LARGER REPUTATION** IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

was turned into refugees, the world looked for America's reaction. The response: a vote of 410-8 in the U.S. Congress for a resolution drafted by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC)—one that went further than Bush himself in backing Israel. When Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki on a state visit to Washington voiced some support for Hezbollah—no doubt reflecting the overwhelming majority of the Shi'ites who voted his government into office—Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean abjectly denounced the Iraqi as an anti-Semite.

It is not obvious what Israel's response to the Hezbollah raid should have been—to trade prisoners as Hezbollah likely

ica's larger reputation in the Middle East? Does it shrink or expand the pool of potential anti-American terrorists? Such questions answer themselves.

While Congress and the political class cheered on the smashing of Lebanon—the repair bill will be sent to U.S. taxpayers—the neoconservatives have gone further, with key figures such as Bill Kristol calling for Bush to use the Israeli-Hezbollah war as a pretext, a golden excuse for bombing Iran. The Christian Zionist Right made the neoconservatives seem judicious by comparison: Rev. Mike Evans, bestselling author and founder of the Jerusalem Prayer Team, opined that "45 million" Islamic fundamentalists whose goal was "total world

# State in War

The cycle of violence continues. No one wins.

By Stewart Nusbaumer

HAIFA, ISRAEL—There are three potential positions on a war. You can be *for* a war, *against* a war, or *in* a war. When in a war the arguments for and against are superfluous, importance having been reduced to survival. From my experience in a dozen wars that seems to be the most war teaches. But a weird subgroup of humanity keeps showing up at these wars, not to fight but to:

"I come to see the war," says a broad-shouldered Mongolian with shoulder-length shiny hair and a big smile.

"I have come to pray for Israel," pronounces a fundamentalist Christian from North Carolina with eyes fired by piousness, "The Bible says..."

"I'm here to write about Eli's Pub," says this American with bloodshot eyes. Although I know that I can learn more about the war in Eli's Pub than on the frontline, I also know I won't be able to resist going to the front.

The eerie high-pitched siren, signaling Hezbollah rockets are on their way to Haifa. Down the hall is the hotel's safe room, a reinforced windowless bunker with several chairs and beds. Up the street is the public shelter, underground and hardened with more safety, but the run takes an uncomfortable several minutes. Directly across the street is Eli's Pub, dim but not dark, a tad plain but relaxed, the music soothing blues and occasionally classic rock. But not everyone is comfortable sitting in a bar during a Katyusha rocket attack.

"We must fight, we have no choice," Eli the bar owner says. A loud explosion shakes the walls, rattling the windows.

In the last month, Hezbollah has fired more than 3,000 rockets into Israel, and Haifa, a short lob from the border, has absorbed more than 100. Tall and slender with short hair, Eli is a navy reservist and will probably be activated soon. "Of course I don't want to go, but we're under attack."

"It's our fate," a middle-aged man on the next barstool chimes in, "Before it was Nazis, now its Arabs." Retired from the Israeli army, he fought in the 1973 Yom Kippur War and in southern Lebanon in the 1980s. "I don't want war but—" A sharp crack outside, the beer in my mug vibrates slightly.

"I'm against war," says a cute waitress lounging at the bar—there are few customers in Katyusha-raining Haifa—"but what can we do? They steal our soldiers, kill them!" She was discharged from the army last year and may also be reactivated soon.

That is pretty much the range of opinion among Israelis one month after war with Hezbollah began: "no choice ... our fate ... what can we do?" There have been too many wars for Israelis to think otherwise. The war for independence in 1948, the Six-Day War in 1967, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, the war in Lebanon in the 1980s and again today. Wars interspaced by suicide bombings in Jerusalem pizza parlors, rocket attacks across Israel's southern and northern borders, uprisings in the occupied West Bank, skirmishes and ambushes, verbal threats of annihilation—the latest from the mouth of Iran's president insisting Israel must be wiped off the map.

In this more than half-century of war between Israel and Muslim countries, the antagonists agree on essentially nothing, except that it's a David-Goliath struggle. Then they disagree on who is David and who is Goliath.

Israelis point out that their country is a tiny sliver of land comprising less than 1 percent of the total Arab territories, that 6 million Jews are surrounded by 150 million Arabs whose combined armies are more than 10 times larger than their army. Arabs say hogwash. Israel is an extension of Western power, especially American power, an outpost planted on their land. They are fighting not a tiny Jewish state but a superpower proxy. Each side claims to be David and insists that the other is Goliath. Each side claims defense and accuses the other of aggression:

"Wait!" one side hisses at me, "we only responded to what they did to us!"

"You filthy liar" the other side shrieks, "we only attacked you because you attacked us first!"

The nasty accusations ping-pong back and forth over 4,000 years of charges and counter-charges continuing all the way back to the beginning when Abraham, the patriarch of the Jews, journeyed from the land of Ur in the north to the holy land of Israel. If we could establish whether it was Abraham or the locals who threw the first stone, then we might be able to fast-forward through all this ugly history and unravel the justifications and false-justifications for each war leading us right up to today's shootout in southern



Lebanon. But Eli's Pub is not up to that challenge tonight. A plastered professional is on the phone ordering a taxi to take three first-rate journalists with several mammoth bags of photo equipment, one laptop computer, and 47 bottles of Gold Star beer to the Israel-Lebanon border. I've always found it interesting what taxi drivers, especially at three in the morning, will do for money.

The light of dawn seeps over Lebanon's dark mountains as compact yellow-red flashes rip across a rolling green valley. It is war's light show. From Lebanon two Katyusha rockets streak across the sky—white trails arching overhead—and slam into Israel. From Israel four thunderous tank rounds roar off and crash in Lebanon. But southern Lebanon is devastated and desolate while northern Israel has only isolated damage. It appears to be another slaughter in the making to feed the Arab mind that Israel is Goliath. Another military rout to fuel a future war for Arab revenge and self-respect.

The photographers are of course frantic—modern photography's golden rule being a billion photos taken might produce one photo sold. Israeli jets screech toward the devastated and desolate—that defiantly continues to fire rockets into Israel. "If we don't defeat Hezbollah now," an Israeli soldier tells me, "they will only grow stronger and destroy Israel. Hezbollah don't believe in Israel existing." On the television at Eli's Pub, a Hezbollah spokesman said, "We must fight to liberate our land otherwise we'll lose our land forever."

For a grueling week our subgroup of three journalists and one crazed taxi driver traveled back and forth on the Israel-Lebanon border observing the ongoing aerial duels, Israeli troop insertions into war-torn Lebanon, firefights, the resolve of both sides fighting for—

well, survival. For individual soldiers their personal survival, for national armies their group survival; wars that don't end are never about high morality but about basic survival. At night we slept in deserted guesthouses with roofs lifted slightly by outgoing artillery rounds and incoming rocket fire as windows rattled nervously. In the middle of the night a break in the firing had me staring wide-eyed at the rafters; a spooky silence filled the room. In war silence is mesmerizing and horrifying. It forces you to think about their chances for survival.

"Kiryat Shmona is on fire," the crazed cab driver blurts out as the three of us groggily pile into the car.

"Let's go there," a photographer mumbles.

"But it's not safe—"

"Go!" the other photographer barks.

"But my car?"

"There's some extra beer in this for you." Only I know a crazed cab driver's true weak spot.

At first I thought it was a hallucination. It looked like some blurry ball coming out of war's fog. Then I saw it was a fat old woman, with a yellow scarf wrapped around her large head. As she moved closer, I saw her eyes glowed. She spat in my face and attempted to shove me down some steps. Curling her hands into claws, she went after my face, then screamed a slew of words in Arabic with *Katyusha* repeated several times. I decided to take my chances with the rockets in the streets.

Some days it's just not worth getting out of bed. I learned that from our crazed cab driver, who said that every day he was with us. But there may now be a new day.

A UN-sponsored ceasefire is promising 15,000 armed peacekeepers for the devastated and desolate to end the fighting. But 33 days of war did not really change anything.

There remain three potential positions on war—for, against, and in—and most people in this region are in war.

IT APPEARS TO BE **ANOTHER SLAUGHTER IN THE MAKING** TO FEED THE ARAB MIND THAT **ISRAEL IS GOLIATH**. ANOTHER MILITARY ROUT TO FUEL A FUTURE WAR FOR **ARAB REVENGE AND SELF-RESPECT**.

Rockets are pounding the town—exploding in the streets, demolishing parked vehicles, tearing through building walls and apartment roofs. A dozen fires burn on the surrounding hills, a plane swoops down dropping reddish flame retardant. A blanket of gray haze envelopes the battered village. There is another barrage of Katyushas, followed by four puffs of white smoke rising. The photographers race off frantically snapping pictures. I hug a wall writing words in my panting brain.

"We are still in a war," reassured Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah before the ink on the ceasefire treaty dried, "as long as our land is occupied ..." With Israelis saying ownership and Arabs saying occupation, the war for survival will continue. I guess this makes sense—as much sense as that crazy woman in Kiryat Shmona. ■

*Stewart Nussbaumer served in the U.S. Marines in Vietnam and today is editor of InterventionMag.com.*

# Excessive—Or Not Enough?

The noted Israeli historian contemplates his country's reluctance to unleash the full might of its arsenal.

**By Martin van Creveld**

FROM NEW YORK, from London, from Paris, from a dozen others places, people denounce Israel for using “excessive” force in Lebanon.

Israel's relations with Lebanon have a long and complex history; some will even recall how, during the 1930s, the French colonial administration did whatever it could to lure Jewish tourists from what was then Palestine. No sooner had the Jewish State been proclaimed in May 1948 than it was invaded by Lebanese forces. Acting in concert with Syrian ones, their objective was to keep parts of Galilee for themselves when the time for dividing the spoils would come. Instead, they were decisively repulsed, and the two sides established themselves along the international border that had itself been established by Winston Churchill, in his capacity as colonial secretary, back in 1920-21.

For 20 years after that, the border between the two countries was absolutely quiet. Lebanese and Israeli farmers got along famously with each other, and smugglers on both sides were even happier to work together. This was true to the point where the border was left unfenced and where Israeli children visiting the area used to take a few steps across it so as to be able to boast that they, too, had been abroad. Indeed Israelis always expected the Lebanese to sign peace with them as soon as some other Arab country did the same.

Things started changing after 1968 and, even more so, 1970. First came the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War which drove numerous Palestinian refugees from the West Bank into Jordan. Next came the Jordanian Civil War during which King Hussein crushed the Palestinians in his own country, killing thousands. Desperate to escape the tender mercies of the King's Legionaries, some Palestinians actually ran into the Israelis' arms. Many more went to Lebanon where they joined those already there.

With encouragement from Damascus, the Palestinians in Lebanon succeeded in doing what they had not been able to do in Jordan. They destabilized the country, turning it into a base from which terrorists set out to hit targets not only in Israel but, in the form of aircraft, airports, and the like, all over the world. Throughout the 1970s, the Israelis made countless attempts, both in the air and on the ground, to put an end to terrorism but to no avail. Almost always the terrorists were hit, and always they recovered.

The Lebanese Civil War (1976-90), the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and its occupation of a “security zone” in the southern part of that country (1982-2000), came and went. So did the various terrorist organizations fighting Israel. First there was the Palestinian Liberation Front, which had established its bases in the refugee camps. Then, during the mid-1980s, came a militia based in the

Shi'ite population of southern Lebanon known as Amal. Finally there was Hezbollah, a much wider-based Shi'ite organization that has the center of its power in southern Beirut. Thanks in large part to Syrian and Iranian support, it turned out to be the most fanatic and the most effective of all.

The climax of the fighting was reached in the summer of 1982. Using no fewer than six divisions and about a thousand tanks, the Israelis overran half of the country, reaching as far north as Beirut—once again, to no avail. Attempts to transform the political situation in Lebanon by setting up a pro-Israeli, Christian-dominated government may never have been realistic. In any case, they failed when Syrian agents assassinated the Christian leader, Bashir Jumail. Before long, the Israelis in Lebanon became the target of a vicious guerrilla war that went on for 18 long years.

By the late 1990s the Israelis, still occupying a security zone several kilometers deep inside Lebanon, were losing about one soldier killed every two weeks—not a large number but still more than public opinion was prepared to accept. In the spring of 2000, then Prime Minister Ehud Barak decided to end the agony by taking the other approach. He withdrew his forces to the international border—as marked, on the ground, by the UN—had them dig in, and awaited developments.

Once again, it did not work. Though the Israelis had withdrawn with the explicit purpose of preventing further incidents, every few months the border flared up. Now Hezbollah terrorists mined patrol roads, inflicting casualties. Now they engaged in sniping, shooting down Israeli soldiers as if they were turkeys. Now they launched rockets into northern Israel, and now they mounted cross-border raids with the objective of taking hostages. On at least one occasion they succeeded; but since the captured soldiers died almost immediately things were not taken any further.

This was the time of the so-called Second Palestinian Uprising, which gave the Israelis enough to do and to spare. Hence they responded in a measured way; shelling and bombing Hezbollah positions overlooking the border but taking great care not to escalate the conflict. Each time, after a few hours the government of Lebanon would request an armistice and things would calm down. Each time, Hezbollah's determination to do whatever it could to harm Israel would remain unaffected.

The killing of five Israeli soldiers and the kidnapping of two more on July 12, 2006 proved to be the last straw. As so often in the past, the Israelis' initial response was measured. Using their air force, which is capable of very great precision, they targeted fuel depots, bridges, overflights, and the runways and fuel depots of Beirut International Airport—runways and depots, of course, being selected specifically because, by destroying them, traffic can be disrupted without anybody being hurt at all.

Later air activity became much more extensive. Even so, strikes aimed at inhabited areas, such as the Hezbollah-infested Shi'ite settlements of southern Lebanon and the Beirut neighborhoods where the Hezbollah offices are located,

were carried out only after the population had been warned to leave them. As also happened in Kosovo, Iraq, and other places, out of thousands of bombs dropped a few went astray, causing civilian casualties.

Always prone to exaggerate, the Arab media may speak of the ongoing "carnage." In reality, the reported number of Lebanese dead is under 1,000. Far fewer people are being killed by the Israelis in Lebanon than is the case in Iraq where several thousand are losing their lives, often in horrible ways, every month; since that is a case of Arabs slaughtering other Arabs, though, nobody cares. Meanwhile over 3,000 rockets of various calibers rained down indiscriminately on towns throughout northern Israel. As of the fourth week of the campaign, the result was over 1,000 casualties who required hospital treatment as well as

threat and can be dealt with much more effectively.

Whatever the gentlemen in New York, London, Paris, and other capitals may say, the problem in Lebanon is not the Israelis' use of excessive force. To the contrary, it is their extreme reluctance, repeatedly exhibited over years on end, to use enough force to solve the problem once and for all—to do what must be done at once, without explanation, and without offering an apology. As a result they wasted a full month, arguing with each other while desperately hoping for the U.S., the U.N., the Security Council, anybody, to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them.

In part, their reluctance was due to worries about casualties as well as fear of international condemnation. In large part, however, it was due to the plain fact that the Israeli army, made up of

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hundreds of thousands who were forced either to take shelter or to leave their homes.

War is a moral and physical struggle by means of the latter. Judging by previous wars of the same kind, not only in the Middle East but throughout the world, Israel probably will not be able to deliver a knockout blow to Hezbollah. It may, however, achieve lesser aims, such as re-establishing a security zone in southern Lebanon. Such a zone will not solve all problems, but at any rate it will put an end to cross-border operations and prevent Hezbollah from using short-range rockets against Israel. It is true the organization also has some long-range ones. Those, however, being larger and easier to detect, represent less of a

ordinary Israeli citizens, simply does not have what it takes to do what King Hussein of Jordan did to the Palestinians in 1970 and President Hafez Assad of Syria did to his own people in 1982—both times, *nota bene*, with such success that the effects are being felt to the present day. For the sake of Lebanon, Israel, and every country that has ever been targeted by Islamic terrorism throughout the world, one can only hope that this reluctance will not prove a costly mistake. ■

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*Martin van Creveld, professor at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel, is widely considered one of the world's foremost experts on military history and strategy.*



# War & Peace Parties

Joe Lieberman's loss reveals the growing partisan divide over Iraq.

By W. James Antle III

UNLIKE MANY IDEOLOGICALLY out-of-step politicians, Connecticut Sen. Joseph Lieberman didn't change parties. The two parties changed their take on him. After losing to antiwar Democrat Ned Lamont, the party's 2000 vice-presidential nominee went from a Democratic rising star to an independent candidate who takes support from Republican pundit Sean Hannity and phone calls from Karl Rove.

Just hours before the three-term incumbent took the stage at Hartford's Goodwin Hotel to concede defeat in the Democratic primary, Lieberman enjoyed the support of Bill and Hillary Clinton, his state's senior senator Chris Dodd, and leading congressional Democrats. By the next morning, Dodd, the House and Senate minority leaders, and both houses' Democratic campaign committee chairmen transferred their endorsements to Lamont. Hillary Clinton's political action committee sent the man who beat Lieberman a \$5,000 contribution.

But Lieberman gained some new friends to make up for the loss. Syndicated columnist Cal Thomas blamed the outcome on "Taliban Democrats." *The Weekly Standard* devoted a cover package to the specter of "Ned Lamont Democrats." Fred Barnes waved the bloody shirt of George McGovern's 1972 landslide defeat, while Bill Kristol derided the foreign policy of Iraq War opponents as "all carrot and no stick." *National Review* endorsed Lieberman's independent candidacy. Republican leaders from Dick Cheney to Ken Mehlman expressed their disappointment in the loyal opposition.

The trend had been building for months. Throughout the summer, activist liberal bloggers rejoiced as polls showed Lamont slowly overtaking Lieberman while neoconservative pundits looked on in increasing horror. Robert Kagan called Lieberman "the last honest man." *The Weekly Standard's* Kristol fumed, "What drives so many Democrats crazy about Lieberman is not simply his support for the Iraq war. It's that he's unashamedly pro-American." John Podhoretz fretted on *National Review's* website that Lieberman was "a great man" threatened by "a suicidal effort to purify" the Democratic Party. Chameleon political consultant Dick Morris blasted Lamont, a former client, as a "rich, light-weight dilettante."

Beneath the vitriol lies a potentially significant development in the politics of the Iraq War—the possible emergence of the Democrats as a truly antiwar party while the Republican Party adopts as its highest priority "staying the course." Lieberman's defeat is critical for this realignment not because he voted for the war, as did most Senate Democrats, but because he has remained closer to the Bush administration line that all is well in Baghdad than almost any leading member of his party.

In a Senate speech that would come back to haunt him later, Lieberman scolded fellow Democrats "who distrust President Bush" and reminded them that in wartime "we undermine presidential credibility at our nation's peril." Lamont says he decided to challenge Lieberman after the senator wrote a *Wall Street*

*Journal* op-ed opposing withdrawal and touting "the coming victory."

Apart from the war, it is difficult to see why Lieberman would be a conservative hero or liberal villain. As his Democratic supporters repeatedly pointed out during the primary fight, he votes with his party 90 percent of the time. The ratings from ideological interest groups tell the same story. His 2005 Americans for Democratic Action rating was 80 compared to just 8 from the American Conservative Union—the year before, the ACU gave Lieberman a zero.

Lieberman voted with the liberal, high-immigration League of United Latin American Citizens 100 percent of the time, the AFL-CIO 92 percent, and the NAACP 85 percent. Despite his culturally conservative rhetoric, he earned an 83 from the ACLU and a zero from the Christian Coalition. In 2004, Lieberman had a perfect score from NARAL, having voted against the partial-birth abortion ban six times, and never voted with the National Right to Life Committee. He opposed the Bush tax cuts, Samuel Alito's nomination to the Supreme Court, and the federal marriage amendment while supporting the Kyoto Accords, higher government spending, and taxpayer funding of abortions overseas.

Conservatives cheered primary challengers to liberal Republicans Arlen Specter and Lincoln Chafee. But many of them are nevertheless supporting Lieberman, whose voting record is actually to Specter and Chafee's left.

For some on the Right, the social and economic issues that were once the con-

servative movement's *raison d'être* have been trumped by the war. "Sen. Joe Lieberman is a limited man... So was Sen. Andrew Johnson (D., Tenn.)," wrote *National Review* senior editor Richard Brookhiser. "But he was pro-Union in the winter of 1860-61, and that's what counted then, as the Middle East is what counts now."

*New York Times* columnist David Brooks went one step further, pinning for a bipartisan, pro-war ticket of John McCain and Lieberman in the next presidential election. While Brooks envisioned the independent route, Bill Kristol recommended Lieberman to the Republicans: "Is it too fanciful to speculate about a 2008 GOP ticket of McCain-Lieberman, or Giuliani-Lieberman, or Romney-Lieberman, or Allen-Lieberman, or Gingrich-Lieberman?"

A few conservatives found this too much to take. *Human Events* editor Terry Jeffrey complained that Giuliani-Lieberman would "give the GOP an all-liberal, all-blue state ticket in 2008." The columnist Robert Novak chided Republicans for "shedding crocodile tears" over Lieberman. ACU Chairman David Keene told Novak, "I don't see why any conservative should be overly concerned about Joe Lieberman's plight."

Yet for neoconservatives, there are at least two reasons. Without the bipartisan cover provided by Democrats like Lieberman, it will become more difficult for Congress to resist antiwar public opinion. Liberal hawks have become an endangered species and Lamont's election could hasten their extinction.

More importantly, the president's low approval ratings make him a poor choice to defend the Iraq War and neo-conservative foreign policy generally. Politicians who are seen as moderates—think Lieberman, McCain, and Giuliani—are more attractive spokesmen and may help hawks recast support for the war as a centrist position.

The flipside of this strategy is to paint antiwar candidates like Lamont as liberal extremists. David Frum, for example, announced that the Democrats "are again the party of the nuclear freeze and unconditional withdrawal, of George McGovern and George McClellan."

Playing on the Democrats' image as weak on national security has worked before. But opposition to the Iraq War is not limited to some far-left fringe. An Aug. 6 *Washington Post* poll found 62 percent disapproved of the situation in Iraq while 35 percent approved. That second figure looks a lot like Bush's approval rating, suggesting that the GOP may have acquired its own national-security baggage.

Antiwar Democrats also have many advantages their forebears who opposed the Vietnam War did not. The party's Southern conservative wing has shrunk almost to the point of irrelevance and its national elected officials are heavily concentrated in the blue states, where the war is especially unpopular. *Daily Kos* and the liberal "netroots" have a far greater reach than Vietnam-era activist circles. And while the Iraq debate is not without culture-war overtones, contemporary antiwar sentiment is not tainted by anything like the social turbulence of the 1960s.

It would be a mistake, however, to suggest that Lieberman's loss to Lamont was attributable to the war alone. Exit polls showed that 39 percent of antiwar Democrats stuck with Lieberman. The netroots remain supportive of Democrats who favor the war and hold various conservative positions as long as they are sufficiently combative toward Bush.

Although conservative enthusiasm for Lieberman is unwarranted, Iraq is just one count in the netroots' indictment against him. He has been willing to make symbolic gestures to gain Republican support at liberals' expense throughout his career.

William F. Buckley Jr. endorsed Lieberman in his first Senate run against liberal Republican Lowell Weicker in 1988. He went on to work with William Bennett in criticizing sexually explicit films, television shows, and music. And Lieberman famously denounced Bill Clinton as "immoral" at a key moment in the impeachment saga.

Such feints to the right were popular among Democratic politicians with national aspirations during the 1990s. Aside from the occasional capital-gains tax cut or Republican-sponsored energy bill, they hardly ever affected his voting record. But Lieberman continued to be conciliatory toward Republicans at inconvenient moments during a time when restless Democrats began looking for something a bit stronger.

Even moderates like Simon Rosenberg call for "a new progressive politics of confrontation, not accommodation." Conservatives should recognize this strategic shift. It is the one Newt Gingrich used to rally an embittered Republican minority in the early '90s. His predecessor as House GOP leader, the long-suffering Bob Michel, had a voting record as conservative as Lieberman's is liberal. But Michel was seen as too willing to cut deals with the Democratic majority. Gingrich didn't wait until the Clinton years to show he was different—he led the conservative revolt against George H.W. Bush's tax-raising budget deal.

Yet Iraq is the issue that allowed this movement to reach critical mass, making the Connecticut race a test case once again. Lamont currently trails Lieberman by 5 points, but if he shores up support among independents—who oppose the war by a 2-to-1 margin—he could pull off another upset. The Lamont-Lieberman rematch will give Democrats the choice of being a real antiwar party—and the GOP the choice of becoming a party of war above all else. ■

# The Ghost of Suez

Fifty years on, America risks repeating Britain and France's imperial folly.

By Wayne Merry

THE SUEZ CRISIS OF 1956 has faded in historical memory for most Americans. What happened, and why, is often confused by the later Cold War rivalry in the Middle East. The episode was, however, a true turning point in the troubled relations of the Arab world and the West, and Arab attitudes toward later American policies are colored by what transpired during those summer and autumn months five decades ago.

Throughout the Middle East, America is now believed to have the same objectives as did the British and French: oil and empire rather than freedom and democracy. Half a century hence, will we be judged to have learned from their imperial failure or to have emulated it?

A French commercial concession built the Suez Canal (opened in 1869), while Britain later acquired a dominant financial position in the company and assumed direct control of both the canal and Egypt itself. Both governments profited from the collapse of Ottoman power in the First World War, embodied in the secret 1915 Sykes-Picot Agreement. France took control of the territories that became Lebanon and Syria, while Britain significantly enriched its empire with lands it formed into Palestine, Trans-Jordan, and Iraq. The key objective of British policy—and the subject of much rivalry with France and later Turkey—was the oil fields around Mosul in northern Iraq.

London wanted an active American role in the remains of Ottoman Turkey to provide strategic cover for British exploitation of Mesopotamian petroleum. So Lloyd George's government pro-

posed to President Wilson that the United States accept mandates for Armenia (to create a buffer state between Leninist Russia and Kemalist Turkey), Constantinople, and even Anatolia as a whole. America would ensure order to the north of Britain's newly acquired domains and assume the substantial expense of protecting Armenia and transforming post-Ottoman Turkey. Wilson was more or less inclined to such a nation-building role, regardless that the United States had never been at war with Turkey and hence was not a party to the Treaty of Sèvres that carved up Turkey for Allied purposes. U.S. mandates for Constantinople and Anatolia died within the executive branch, but Wilson requested congressional authorization for an Armenian mandate. After due consideration, Congress refused, foreseeing much expense and little benefit and correctly divining British motives. The United States did later participate as an observer in negotiation of the Treaty of Lausanne, which superseded the abortive Sèvres Treaty, mostly to protect American commercial access to regional petroleum.

By 1956, Britain had withdrawn from South Asia and France from Indochina. Both had formally given independence to the former Ottoman lands but still exercised great influence there. Britain remained the leading military power in the Persian Gulf, while the imperial map of Africa had barely changed.

The Suez Crisis began when the Egyptian nationalist government of Gamal Abdel Nasser sought external funding for a vast power and irrigation dam at Aswan. Frustrated with Western

refusals, Nasser turned to the only major moneymaking entity in the country, the Suez Canal. Nasser nationalized the company on July 26 and seized physical control of the canal. Lionized in Egypt and the Arab world, Nasser was actually on solid legal ground as the canal was an Egyptian-registered commercial entity with a 99-year lease. Technically, Nasser nationalized the remaining 12 years of the concession, publicly offering compensation to the shareholders. He also pledged to operate the canal in accord with relevant international treaties. In reality, there never would have been enough revenue from the canal to operate it, compensate the shareholders, and build the Aswan High Dam, but the promise of compensation was on the table. In addition, Nasser even allowed a few ships bound for Israel—although not Israeli-flag ships—to transit the canal, something the British had not done. Egypt contracted for technical personnel and pilots, some from the Soviet bloc, to operate the canal, which continued normal operations during the political phase of the "crisis."

The reaction in Washington was reserved. The Eisenhower administration did not like Nasser but viewed his actions as a legitimate exercise of eminent domain. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles viewed seizure of the canal as an acceptable action by a sovereign state so long as compensation and adherence to transit treaties were observed, both of which Nasser had promised. Washington thus saw a problem to be managed, not a crisis to be resolved.



But the British and French governments viewed Nasser's action through their respective imperial lenses and decided that regime change in Cairo was essential for a satisfactory outcome. Their motives differed.

Fourth Republic France was in deep crisis. Dien Bien Phu and the loss of Indochina were only three years in the past, while French policymakers viewed the growing Algerian Revolution as an existential challenge. Paris believed that outside support from Egypt kept the insurgency in Algeria going. In fact, while Nasser's propaganda machine gave loud encouragement to the Algerians, he provided little substantive aid. French leaders hoped that removing Nasser would resolve their problem in Algeria. Thus the Suez Crisis was an opportunity to deal with a separate regional issue rather than a question of canal ownership, as well as an opportunity to demonstrate the continued efficacy of French arms.

British motivations were complex and political, indeed psychological. The canal was no longer a vital waterway to British India, although it did connect the UK to its remaining east-of-Suez obligations. Britain had completed withdrawal of its military forces and bases from Sinai and the canal only weeks earlier and had sought a working relationship with Nasser. British commerce adapted to the canal seizure without panic or serious dislocation. Shipping and maritime insurance rates remained relatively stable. The City wanted the government to "do something" but not something violent.

Prime Minister Anthony Eden, however, saw Nasser's action as intolerable to British prestige and as a challenge of a very personal character. Eden had helped determine British basing policy at Suez as an army officer and had overseen the negotiations leading to the British military withdrawal as foreign secretary in Churchill's second ministry.

Eden in 10 Downing Street was always in the shadow of his great predecessor, worrying about unfavorable comparisons if his actions were seen as weak. The "what would Winston have done" question loomed large for Eden and his cabinet, who were living embodiments of Britain's former imperial greatness. To be challenged by a man such as Nasser—a mere colonel and a native one at that—struck at their core self-esteem.

London and Paris secretly determined on military intervention to restore control of the canal and to shore up their remaining imperial positions. They disagreed over how to proceed. The French wanted swift action, arguing that the Egyptian military would collapse in the face of European forces and that casualties from a hastily organized operation were justifiable while domestic shock at the canal seizure was fresh. The British, who would field the greater part of the forces and the senior commands, wanted thorough preparation, believing the Egyptians they had trained would fight well and recalling the difficulties of expeditionary operations from the war. Three months passed.

Complicating the Anglo-French response was the involvement of Israel. The leadership of the young Jewish state understood that Nasser's nationalism would sooner or later present them with a threat resulting in war. Israel wanted to confront Nasser quickly but not alone. France was then Israel's great-power sponsor. Fourth Republic France felt a strong kinship with Israel, sharing European socialist traditions, and provided most of its imported weaponry. The United States was then less engaged with Israel, tilting more toward the emerging Arab states. France and Israel secretly negotiated an alliance to coordinate their actions, another Treaty of Sèvres, surely a diplomatic ill omen. Britain was less directly involved with Israel than was France, although its later

denials when the shooting started lacked much plausibility.

In late October, the three countries struck, Israel first with a rapid armored sweep across Sinai, followed by British and French naval and air forces, ostensibly to protect the canal in light of the Israeli-Egyptian conflict. The use of bases on Cyprus and Malta and in Libya, plus the vast Anglo-French expeditionary armada, made obvious their operations were well-prepared and coordinated with the Israeli attack.

What the world witnessed was massive use of military force in circumstances that lacked a clear sense of urgency or proportionality. The canal had been operating normally, but now Nasser sank 40-odd ships in transit causing shipping and maritime insurance rates to soar. Negotiations on the "crisis" had been ongoing at the UN, where Washington made clear its opposition to use of force. Britain and France employed their vetoes in the Security Council to block a ceasefire. Worse, their attacks caused significant collateral damage and civilian casualties. Despite the preparations, the operation experienced common fog-of-war problems, creating bad press for London and Paris, eroding their moral high ground.

Washington was not amused. Despite the high value it placed on its allies, the Eisenhower administration judged their intervention to be an entirely wrong response to Nasser's action. It saw no benefit in associating with a military intervention that closed the canal without a tincture of legality and did not believe the declining imperial powers could restore their regional dominance. Moreover, their attacks complicated U.S. efforts to counter Soviet inroads in the emerging non-aligned countries. Eisenhower also did not buy the argument that only European management could operate the canal. He had been skeptical of similar views as a young officer serving in

the Panama Canal Zone; still less did he accept a white man's burden for a sea-level canal at Suez.

Washington decided to rein in her allies using political and financial pressure. (Postwar London and Paris were deeply in hock to the U.S.) Britain and France abandoned their intervention, with recriminations toward the Americans whose support they had, in true imperial fashion, regarded as theirs by right. Eden suffered a nervous breakdown. Canadian Foreign Minister Lester Pearson orchestrated a United Nations peacekeeping intervention for which he won a Nobel Peace Prize. In time, the canal was reopened, the shareholders lost, Nasser got in bed with Moscow on a serious basis, the Aswan High Dam was built, the British Conservative Party managed to survive this near-death experience, and the French Fourth Republic lurched at home and in Algeria down the path toward the Fifth.

The key failure of British and French policymakers was in their estimation of the power of Arab nationalism. While Nasser was in many ways a demagogue, his stature at home and throughout the developing world was immensely enhanced. No Arab judged Nasser by the legalities of canal seizure or by his battlefield performance but by his proud defiance of former European imperial masters. Despite, or perhaps because of, decades of experience with Arab peoples, London and Paris could not deal with an Egyptian national leader otherwise than with condescension. They were oblivious to the Arab street.

The British and French were in fact rescued by Eisenhower from a worse fate if they had achieved military "victory." They could blame Washington for their failure, but the alternative would have been even more ignominious retreat from an Arab world not awed into compliance and servility. Had they pursued "success" at Suez, Britain and France might have been bank-

rupted by the effort, while their "defeat" set the stage for more modest but more sustainable roles.

While Britain and France sulked their way toward unprecedented prosperity, the U.S. gradually took on many of their former roles in the Middle East. In part this shift represented the end of a Eurocentric world and the assumption of superpower status by the United States. More recently, however, the U.S. has pursued effective hegemony in the Middle East and thus replicated its imperial predecessors.

First, the United States replaced France as Israel's exclusive patron. Given the option, Israel might have preferred to balance its improving American ties with a continuing French alliance. De Gaulle removed the option. When the 1967 War shattered a generation of Israeli diplomatic engagements, the mutual dependency with the U.S. was forged, in time compromising the policy flexibility of both governments. The closeness of the relationship has rendered fruitless U.S. efforts at balance in the region or, more to the point, to be perceived as balanced. In the Eisenhower years, Arab countries could think of the U.S. as more or less evenhanded. No longer. Protestations to the contrary, the United States has lost the stance of honest broker, a loss for the U.S. as well as for Israel.

Second, after Britain's military withdrawal from the Persian Gulf and the subsequent failure of our *de facto* alliance with the Shah of Iran, the United States assumed a dominant and continuing role in Gulf security. Today, it is clear that U.S. forces will remain in the Gulf Arab states regardless of what transpires in Iraq. This assumption of the former British role has had momentous consequences, not least in how we are perceived throughout the Middle East. A key test was after the first Gulf War, when American forces remained in Saudi Arabia despite our ear-

lier pledges. There were warnings at the time that maintaining troops on the same soil as the holiest cities of Islam would constitute a standing affront and a virtual recruiting poster for anti-American extremism. The permanent stationing of U.S. forces within Saudi Arabia and around its perimeter proclaimed that America had come to the region for the same reasons as the British and French: to dominate rather than liberate.

Third, London and Paris successfully maintained themselves in the Middle East for decades by shoring up and subsidizing a series of autocratic, corrupt, and often ineffectual regimes—regimes willing to sell out the interests of their peoples in return for imperial support. In Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states, the United States does the same. We are viewed within the Arab world as a bulwark of undemocratic and dishonest regimes, as judging a government not by its electoral legitimacy but by its willingness to accommodate U.S. policies.

More recently, we have even assumed the former British role of external villain in Turkey. Conspiracy theories about Lloyd George at least had a basis in his policies, but today Turks across the political spectrum deeply believe the United States is actively plotting to weaken or even dismantle their country. Almost nowhere is our national standing lower than in this erstwhile ally.

The parallels between British and French failure at Suez and contemporary American policy are almost too painful to enumerate: faith in the efficacy of military intervention, especially bombardment warfare; the demonization of a nationalist leader combined with belief that regime change alone would solve the problem; an expectation that the post-conflict situation would take care of itself; a conviction that intervention in one country would resolve profound regional problems elsewhere; a focus on prestige and perceived

credibility; ignorance and patronization of Arab traditions and self-esteem; an unwillingness to employ multilateral mechanisms until a policy fails; a counterproductive linking of policy with Israeli interests; and even a simplistic reading of the experience of Winston Churchill. The ironic distinction with 50 years ago is that the United States has no greater power ally to show us the way out of our impasse.

Perhaps the example of Eisenhower can guide us. His successful conduct of great-power foreign policy was based on clearly defined national interests and achievable goals, plus limiting the scale of risk in external engagements. The reason traditional conservatives reject what is often termed Wilsonian foreign policy is because it fails these standards. When Wilson sent the Marines into Haiti, he proclaimed they would remain until the locals had "learned to elect good men." By that criterion, the U.S. military presence in the Middle East will be a very long one.

Eisenhower also wanted this country to move with the flow of post-colonial history, which was about national self-fulfillment rather than democracy. Today, the United States proclaims its motives in the Middle East are freedom and democracy, but everyone there believes they are oil and empire. To be on the right side of history requires the United States to recognize both the continuing potency of Arab nationalism and the inchoate state of its democracy and to accept our own inability to direct or accelerate the slow development of history in that culture. Otherwise, on the centenary of the Suez crisis, commentators may look back on the imperial failures in the Middle East of Britain, France, and of the United States. ■

*Wayne Merry is a former State Department and Pentagon official and a member of the Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy.*

# Suicide of Brewster

James Burnham doesn't eat here anymore.

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

"WINNER GETS TO STAY in the country," I announced as I tossed them the basketball. My teammate, Justin, rolled his eyes. *Dougherty, that's offensive.* Then he laughed. *But they don't understand a word.* The only thing we could interpret from our Guatemalan opponents were the words "Red Shirt." That was me. High-school Spanish hadn't prepared us for the average pickup basketball game in our own town.

We got ready to take our first possession, crouched behind the foul line. As I stared down my opponent, I could hear the train pulling in down the street. I had just read that James Burnham, the first foreign-affairs editor of *National Review*, took that same train to our town when he commuted from his Manhattan office to his home in Kent, Connecticut. Justin, seeing that I was distracted from the game, shouted, "Go!" I drove to the basket, receiving his pass over my shoulder. Easy lay-up. 1-0, us.

Burnham was one of several ex-communists who defected to conservatism and landed at *National Review*. A disciple of Leon Trotsky and frequent contributor to socialist publications like *New International* in the 1930s, Burnham brought his powerful brand of scientific political analysis to a conservative movement that had shown fondness for theological and literary speculations. His *Suicide of the West* became a classic among movement conservatives. Therein he explained liberalism as the ideology that rationalizes not only the power of our current elite but the dissolution and contraction of Western civilization in the face

of communistic and Third World threats. As we discovered our Guatemalan opponents to be surpassingly good jumpshooters, it occurred to me that Burnham's treatise helped to explain the dissolution of the village that connected me, in a small way, to him. I'd give it more thought later as my immediate concern was my defender's elbow whenever we boxed each other out for the next rebound. 5-4, them. I wondered how I would explain my exile to my family if things continued this way.

The village of Brewster, N.Y. is part of the larger town Southeast—though everyone in the town refers to the whole as Brewster. The area attracted its immigrants for a few reasons. Brewster sits where I-684, which comes north from New York City, meets I-84, which travels west to Scranton, Pennsylvania and northeast through Hartford into Massachusetts. In the early 1990s, Brewster became a destination for families leaving New York City who couldn't afford Westchester County. The development brought lots of part-time jobs in construction and contracting.

Apparently Brewster was not the only town experiencing mass immigration from Guatemala. In the Aug. 14 issue of *The Weekly Standard*, Christopher Caldwell examined the effect of a massive influx of Guatemalans from Tacaná to Georgetown, Delaware and found a great success story. "There is a demand for people from Tacaná who have two decades experience in the peculiar economy of chicken, soybeans, and retirement homes, and two decades of

ties to the community out of which that economy grows." There is some identity theft but no gangs. Hispanic children do better than their white and black counterparts in Georgetown schools. There has been some tension, but Georgetown is reconciling itself to the new residents who may now outnumber the old.

## THE TOWN IS SLOWLY RESIGNING ITSELF TO WHATEVER CHIQUIMULA MAKES OF THIS NEW YORK VILLAGE.

Georgetown's Guatemalans sound great—at least by Caldwell's account. But Brewster gets its immigrants from Chiquimula, which I gather must be on the wrong side of the tracks in Guatemala. I'm not sure how Chiquimula prepared its people to shovel snow, yet somehow they do it so well. In the summer the same immigrants ride lawnmowers on the corporate properties and grassy spaces in condo developments along the highways. The supply actually seems to generate the demand for the work they do. Immigrants move into the village without their families. They wait on the curbs in the morning to be picked up. If you are 16 and want beer, they will buy it for you if you give them five bucks. At night they loiter and urinate in the streets. When my girlfriend and I pick up Chinese food, they stare intensely, making her feel vaguely threatened. Part of their culture, I guess. Longtime residents tire of this and move out to the new developments where property management companies truck immigrants to cut their grass.

The town knows that it cannot sustain more growth and has changed its zoning laws to severely limit residential development. But even though expansion around the outskirts of town has been stopped through ordinances, the village population remains unregulated. The town newsletter, which almost

never deviates between perk and smirk while discussing school taxes or traffic patterns, recently informed the good citizens, "We all know that the Town is experiencing a problem with illegal overcrowded apartments. While the problem is still primarily concentrated within the confines of the Village of

Brewster, we are beginning to see an increase outside of the Village."

Businesses in the village, like the Whistle Stop restaurant, consider closing as La Guadalupana, a Mexican grocer and restaurant, expands. Amigo's Gift Shop compliments El Universal and other Spanish-language storefronts. Bob's Diner, which sits across the street from the train platform and represents the Platonic ideal of diner-ness with its greasy food, small booths, and reassuringly unfriendly staff has been a landmark since Burnham co-founded *National Review* in 1955. How many times did he eat here before retreating to Kent? Would he recognize this village from his booth?

Quoting Mosca in his work *The Machiavellians*, Burnham said, "...those who have the will and, especially the moral, intellectual and material means to force their will upon others take the lead over the others and command them." Brewster's inability to control immigration is part of the larger problem of law enforcement on illegals. Local politicians have called INS repeatedly. "They're here, you deal with them," was the response. They've called Elliot Spitzer, the chief law-enforcement officer in the state with a reputation for fighting white-collar crime. But fighting contractors and landlords is apparently not high on his list of priorities. Instead

of enforcing laws, the state is bribing Brewster by providing more money for "development." A movie theater shuttered a decade ago may become a local musical theater or art-house cinema, ostensibly to attract more business to the village from the town. A day-laborer center has also been discussed.

Facing so many obstacles, the town is slowly resigning itself to whatever Chiquimula makes of this New York village. Parking tickets are enforced on the high-school kids, but imposing our immigration, zoning, and quality of life laws on the immigrants is a task too great for Brewster. It is apparently better for property values to drop, for iconic small businesses to close, for the streets to become dirty than to be called racists. Putting aside the number of man hours it would take to check the legal status of village residents and the number of upset landlords and contractors, the town lacks the moral resources to enforce its laws on people whom it values so little as members of the community and so much as the bottom rung in the economy.

What Burnham recommended, to take charge of our communities and nation, is useful on the basketball court. Justin and I had the will to win, but in order to overcome our Guatemalan opponents we had to deploy our intellectual and material advantages, setting hard picks, crashing the boards, using our speed and intuitive passing skills. I'm happy to report that we won 11-8 and still reside in the United States. Our opponents never formally accepted the stakes of the game. Sweating in the dusk of summer I, Red Shirt, shook their hands, smiled my gringo-grin, and said, "Good game, I'll save you the trouble and call the authorities myself." Justin knew I was joking. The joke's on all of us. ■

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*Michael Brendan Dougherty is books editor of the New Pantagruel.*



# False Prophets

Being a foreign-policy pundit means never having to say you're sorry.

By Justin Logan

ON MAY 16, 2006, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting released a tongue-in-cheek report that triggered wide ridicule in the blogosphere. The report ribbed *New York Times* columnist (and Master of Capitalized Ideas) Thomas L. Friedman for predicting that “the next six months” were to be the crucial, decisive factor in the U.S. occupation of Iraq. The trouble was, Friedman predicted this on Nov. 3, 2003; June 3, 2004; Oct. 3, 2004; Nov. 3, 2004; Sept. 25, 2005; Dec. 18, 2005; Dec. 20, 2005; Dec. 21, 2005; Jan. 23, 2006; Jan. 31, 2006; March 2, 2006; April 23, 2006; and May 11, 2006.

That's a lot of six-month periods. But when called on his goalpost-shifting by CNN's Howard Kurtz, Friedman replied with the cool confidence of an oracle. He furrowed his brow and calmly explained that he'd “been trying to just simply track the situation on the ground. And the fact is that the outcome there is unclear, and I reflected that in my column.” The problem was that “people who hated the war, they want you to declare the war is over, finish, we give up. The right, just the opposite.” The possibility that people just wanted pundits to take clear positions and stick by their predictions was lost on Friedman.

But the problems go much deeper than one pro-war pundit's vacuous pronouncements. The trouble goes to the heart of the foreign-policy commentariat and how Americans develop their views about foreign policy.

There is no sense of civic responsibility in the popular media to measure the accuracy of predictions and weed out

seers who are perennially wrong. Recovering liberal hawk Peter Beinart, after admitting that his support for the Iraq War was wrong, won himself a book deal (reportedly worth more than half a million dollars) to tell Democrats what their foreign policy needs to look like. Beinart was then interviewed by his old magazine, *The New Republic*, about the book. The interviewer asked Beinart: “With a track record like [yours] why should anyone listen to you now?” Beinart's response? “Anything one writes deserves to be judged by itself.”

A foreign-policy establishment—and a media establishment—that endorses such a sentiment is not likely to recalibrate for failures of prediction. And indeed, the debate surrounding the Iraq War hosts a whole cadre of pundits who have made their careers on the basis of well-timed one-liners, not any depth of analysis or accuracy of predictions. Still, they are the people who find their way onto television and into print.

Since there is so much at stake in war—the lives of our countrymen, our tax dollars, our prestige in the world, and even the safety of American citizens at home—it is not surprising that tempers overheat when the topic comes up. But the media have fostered an atmosphere of debate that is not just shrill—it has no internal checks for wrongness.

Take popular pro-war columnist Mark Steyn, for example. In April 2003, Steyn authored a syndicated column in which he sarcastically offered the “top ten impending quagmires.” Steyn responded by advancing stunningly rosy predic-

tions as contrast. Among them, “in a year's time, Baghdad and Basra will have a lower crime rate than most British cities,” “there will be terrible acts of suicide-bomber depravity in the months ahead, but no widespread resentment at or resistance of the Western military presence,” and finally, “a year from now, Iraq will be, at a bare minimum, the least worst governed state in the Arab world, and at best pleasant, civilized, and thriving.”

Instead of feeling chastened, Steyn chose to revisit his column a year later. Even with the occupation growing shakier by the day, Steyn blasted

... idiotic predictions of how [Baghdad] would be a new Stalingrad, with coalition troops fighting street to street for months on end. But, instead of even a moment of sheepish embarrassment, all the experts ... simply galloped on to even more idiotic predictions of doom.

It isn't just polemicists like Steyn who predicted great success and then avoided recrimination when their predictions failed to materialize. Mainstream publications that vocally supported the war declared time and again that each political marker was a milestone of deep significance. *National Review*, for one, has a woeful record of premature celebration.

From the beginning of the war, *NR*'s editorialists chose their conclusions and then sought evidence, all the while blaming the media for insinuating that the situation was somehow less than

glowing. In an April 2003 editorial, the editors blasted the media for judging the war “on the basis not of actual achievements but of ‘expectations.’” To the contrary, *NR* declared, “We have not won yet. But victory is within sight.”

By September 2003, John O’Sullivan weighed in, declaring “no quagmire,” and prodding coalition forces to venture out further into the Iraqi hinterland; after all, “Empires are ultimately run not by proconsuls but by district commissioners.” The editors heralded the capture of Saddam Hussein as a “turning point in the war.” By their telling, “the win is almost in Dubya’s hands ... if handled correctly, [Saddam’s capture] can change the fight from a brewing ethnic civil war to one of Iraq and the Coalition against external forces.”

*NR*’s editorialists greeted the rushed and secretive transfer of sovereignty in June 2004—necessitated by horrific violence in April and May—with a more wobbly optimism. Iraq was “still in a perilous state,” but *NR* sought—and found—“a few encouraging signs.” By the time of the purple-fingered elections of January 2005, the magazine straightened its spine again to declare that “liberals hated freedom in the Middle East, in part because Bush supported it.” To *NR*, the opponents of the war had become not just liberals but actual freedom haters. It turns out the “freedom” promised by the elections wasn’t much to love, anyway. Still, *NR* was not to be deterred. When Iraqi members of Parliament finally approved the Islamist government of Nouri al-Maliki in April 2006, *NR*’s editors declared “A Major Victory.” “Purveyors of doom on Iraq now have some explaining to do,” they crowed. “Iraq pessimists act like they have a special immunity from ever having to recalibrate their view of the conflict, as they instead move on to the latest iteration of their metaphysical despair.” Yes, it’s the pessimists who have explaining to do.

Make no mistake: it isn’t just Mark Steyn and *National Review*. On—appropriately enough—April Fool’s Day 2003, on NPR *Weekly Standard* editor Bill Kristol informed host Terry Gross that “there’s been a certain amount of pop sociology in America ... that the Shi’a can’t get along with the Sunni and the Shi’a in Iraq just want to establish some kind of Islamic fundamentalist regime. There’s almost no evidence of that at all.” Three years later, with a Shi’a-Sunni civil war simmering in Iraq and an Islamist Shi’a government in place, Kristol still sits at the top of the heap when it comes to foreign-affairs punditry.

In fact, Kristol’s predictive powers are so bad that one wonders how the man gets booked onto television. Kristol declared in March 2005, “it seems increasingly likely that [the January elections] will turn out to have been a genuine turning point.” By December 2005, it was the December elections that led Kristol and Robert Kagan to declare, “Happy Days! The Iraqi elections really could be a turning point.” Kagan and Kristol were forced to re-emerge in April 2006 to observe that “Iraq is at a critical turning point.”

Moving his focus to Iran, Kristol predicted in July that if the U.S. initiated a war against Iran, it could “cause [the Iranian people] to reconsider whether they really want to have this regime in power”—despite a wealth of historical evidence that foreign attacks dissolve domestic political disputes and cause populations to rally around the flag.

The silliness goes on: *The American Enterprise*’s Karl Zinsmeister penned a June 2005 article titled “The War Is Over and We Won.” One wonders how he could explain away the hundreds of Americans and thousands of Iraqis who died after the war was supposedly over. (Still, the Bush administration thought enough of his insights to offer Zinsmeister a job as a domestic policy adviser.) *The New*

*Republic*’s hawkish senior editor Lawrence Kaplan admitted that America was developing a case of “milestone fatigue”—even as he used the same column to argue that the December 2005 elections were “reason for hope—finally.”

One could go on at maddening length like this. Not only is there no desire in the media to weed out bad predictors, there is seemingly no demand among Americans for commentators to clear even the most basic standards of credibility. The days of opinion leaders like Walter Lippmann—for all his failings—seem a distant memory of enlightenment and moderation. More gallingly, America’s erroneous soothsayers don’t demonstrate a whit of embarrassment at their endless predictions that we had turned the corner enough to see that the light at the end of the tunnel was in its last throes. The system is broken.

In 1992, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article outlining the dynamics of the “predictions” segment of the popular “McLaughlin Group” TV program. Michael Kinsley, who had been a panelist on the program, admitted,

When I was doing the show, I was much more interested in coming up with an interesting prediction than in coming up with one that was true. There’s no penalty for being wrong, but there is a penalty for being boring. ... Prognosticators have known for centuries that people only remember what you got right. They don’t remember what you got wrong.

Foreign-policy analysis works in much the same way. Errant predictions are quickly forgotten. It is the interesting predictions that the media want, and unfortunately interesting predictions in the context of foreign policy often mean predictions of unprovoked foreign attacks, geopolitical chaos, and a long queue of

bogeymen waiting to threaten us. (By contrast, after a given policy is enacted, its proponents have to spin it in a positive light, as in Iraq.) Meanwhile, it is the person with the quickest wit and the pithiest one-liner—not the deepest understanding—who winds up with the responsibility of informing the American electorate about foreign-policy decisions.

Still, it is hard to blame the media. They are companies just like any other, attempting to make a profit by selling their product: advertisements. With ad revenue determined by how many eyeballs see a given program, the media are only giving us what we want. And Americans seem less interested in good judgment and correct predictions than they are in hearing entertaining banter and provocative rhetoric.

And there is another problem: Americans don't believe that U.S. foreign policy really has any impact on our lives at home. American military action abroad can head off threats—preventive bombing still enjoys an alarmingly robust constituency—but nobody seems to believe that imprudent judgments in foreign affairs can affect him.

Imagine, for example, the most profound evidence that bad policy abroad can impact our lives at home: Sept. 11. To suggest that American foreign policy played a role in motivating the attackers is to “blame the victim.” It is impossible for most Americans to face the fact that our admittedly good intentions in the conduct of foreign policy are sometimes overshadowed by the negative consequences for people overseas and that at times our policies can be so bad that they generate enemies for us. This peculiar outgrowth of American exceptionalism constrains the debate over foreign affairs—and allows provocateurs like Kristol and Co. to maintain their influence.

This matters because many Americans form their views on foreign policy (and politics generally) by watching shouting

heads on television and reading polemicists online. A June 2004 Pew poll indicates that “political polarization is increasingly reflected in the public's news viewing habits.” Indeed, the survey points out that increasing numbers of young people in particular are getting their news from the most partisan sources: cable news and the internet. Newspapers—which are, relative to cable news and blogs, less sensational and partisan—are dwindling in relevance.

Combine these facts with the revelation in Duke political scientist Ole Holsti's work *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*, and you have trouble. According to Holsti, party and ideological affiliation are the best determinant for views on foreign policy. So Americans' views on foreign policy are most shaped by *a priori* political and ideological affiliation, and they increasingly get their news from the shrillest, most partisan sources—sources that are doing very little to ensure the delivery of accurate, well-sourced information.

Presentation matters, too. Pundits peer into our homes from boxes superimposed over stock footage of Shahab missiles, shouting Arabs, and goose-stepping North Korean soldiers. How can anybody have a dispassionate discussion about the options America faces while we are staring down—literally—a sneering Osama bin Laden next to a mushroom cloud?

Blogs and Internet sources aren't any better. Many of the most popular blogs are partisan echo chambers that only engage with the other side for the purposes of demonization, or for straw-manning their arguments.

As political scientist Jeffrey Legro points out in *Rethinking the World*, the bounds of policy options available to policymakers in a democracy are determined by popular beliefs about strategy and are rooted in perceptions about the success or failure of current policies.

Legro argues further that it is the acknowledgement of policy failure that can increase the likelihood in change of collective ideas on foreign policy. He warns, though, that “success and failure are social and political constructs, but public expectations and results set bounds on what can be constructed.” Thus, for a host of Fox News viewers, the Iraq War was, is, and always will be a success. Perhaps this is what prompted Owen Harries to hope in the November 2005 issue of *Commentary* that “failure [in Iraq] will restore balance and prudence to American foreign policy. ... The greater disaster in America's Iraq venture would have been something plausibly resembling a quick and decisive success. What dangerous excesses would that have led us to by now?”

Thus it is not merely the failure itself, which becomes more apparent by the day, but an acknowledgement that the Bush doctrine is a failure that is essential for a recalibration of American security policy. Hoping for such an acknowledgement is not “hoping we fail” or making oneself an “unpatriotic conservative,” in David Frum's unpatriotic formulation, but simply acknowledging reality and hoping that the slow creep of facts leads one's fellow countrymen to recognize it as well.

H.L. Mencken once observed, “The men the American public admire most extravagantly are the most daring liars; the men they detest most violently are those who try to tell them the truth.” That seems to apply doubly to foreign-policy pundits. Until the American people decide to face the depth of the Bush doctrine's failure, we'll be left spinning in circles of turning points—offered by the same hucksters who sold us the doctrine in the first place. ■

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*Justin Logan is an analyst at the Cato Institute and a member of the Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy.*

# Arts & Letters

## FILM

[*Quinceañera*]

### Fifteen Candles

By Steve Sailer

THE MASSIVE May Day marches by illegal immigrants appear to have made film critics finally notice that the American entertainment industry has largely ignored the 28 million people of Mexican origin in this country. In compensation, reviewers are now praising extravagantly "*Quinceañera*," a modest but lively and likeable \$400,000 drama about an American-born Mexican girl's bumpy ride to her traditionally lavish 15th birthday party, or *quinceañera*.

While this is the second straight sentimental movie about minorities by white filmmakers to win the Sundance film festival's Audience Award, at least it's an improvement over its deplorable predecessor, "*Hustle & Flow*," which featured that Oscar-winning song "It's Hard Out Here for a Pimp."

Young Magdalena lives in Los Angeles's Echo Park, which the press gingerly describes as "vibrant." That euphemism means shopkeepers, fearful of local gangs, lower the metal bars over their store windows at 6 p.m., leaving the commercial streets desolate after dark.

Still, Echo Park is superbly located in hills overlooking the skyscrapers of downtown LA. So an influx from trendy Silver Lake of white homosexual men, the standard shock troops of gentrification because they are less vulnerable to crime than male-female couples, has begun economically cleansing Chicanos

from Echo Park's quaint but dilapidated clapboard cottages.

When Magdalena—glumly played by newcomer Emily Rios—suddenly can't fit into her *quinceañera* gown because she's pregnant at 14, her security guard father, who preaches in a storefront Protestant evangelical church, doesn't believe her assertions that she's still a virgin. So she walks out in a huff and moves in with her cheerful, accepting great-great-uncle Tomas, an octogenarian street peddler. Along with her cousin Carlos, a sullen gang-banger who has their area code, "213," tattooed on his neck, they form one of the "random families" so prevalent in the slums.

Then the two white men from the entertainment industry who have just become their landlords invite thuggish Carlos to their housewarming party, which turns out to feature 1970s disco music, fussy decorations, and no women.

Although there are four million Mexicans in Los Angeles County, only a handful play an important role in the film industry, with Robert Rodriguez, director of the "*Spy Kids*" franchise, being the most notable. Indeed, "*Quinceañera*" was written and directed not by Mexican-Americans but by Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland, two former gay pornographers who restored a house in Echo Park.

The best aspect of "*Quinceañera*" is that it offers the least sugarcoated portrayal of homosexuals in recent memory. Since Tom Hanks's "*Philadelphia*" in 1993, Hollywood has been depicting gays as St. Sebastians who die for our sins, rather than as individuals with their own agendas. Glatzer and Westmoreland, in contrast, portray their alter egos in the film as sexual predators who mutually lust after "*cholos* in wifebeaters" like Carlos. But after

weeks of simultaneously abusing the poor boy from the car wash, one of the gentrifiers develops some non-carnal feelings for him, which provokes a spat with his roommate. To eliminate the cause of jealousy, the two gays evict Carlos, Magdalena, and Tomas.

While a definite improvement in realism over typical movies featuring homosexuals, the gay subplot is still phony. That Carlos would be utterly macho yet also so convinced—even before he meets the landlords—that's he's homosexual that his father threw him out of the house is more gay fantasy than reality. What's more common is for wealthy white homosexuals with a taste for masculine minority youths to corrupt them with money or drugs. This exploitation is one source of the widespread homophobia in the inner city.

Unfortunately, the gay white filmmakers don't have the courage to criticize their Mexican characters the same way they take on their own.

Eventually, heartbroken Uncle Tomas dies. At his funeral, Carlos delivers an impassioned eulogy that provides the film's moral: he was a saint because he didn't judge anybody.

Well, swell—except not judging teenage girls who get pregnant out of wedlock is the kind of upper middle class liberal advice that's disastrous for Mexican-Americans, who are suffering an illegitimacy epidemic: 48 percent of all American-born mothers of Mexican descent are unmarried, compared to 41 percent of Mexican immigrant mothers. Apparently, Mexican-Americans are, as is so often blithely claimed, assimilating—but toward African-American norms. Latinos need more intolerance of socially destructive behavior like Magdalena's, not less. ■

Rated R for language, some sexual content, and drug use.



## FILM

# Whit Stillman: From Deb to Disco Balls

By Kelly Jane Torrance

HAS WHIT STILLMAN FINALLY ended his eight-year hiatus from filmmaking? The cult conservative writer-producer-director made three loosely connected movies in the 1990s then vanished not just from Hollywood but America. But in May at the Cannes Film Festival, in the country he now makes his home, Stillman's next project was announced—an adaptation of Christopher Buckley's novel *Little Green Men*.

One could easily be cynical: Stillman has signed on to a number of movies in the last eight years, none of which were made. They were mostly adaptations of others' work, including Anchee Min's *Red Azalea* and Jane Austen's unfinished *Sanditon*. He isn't writing the "Little Green Men" script, either. Could Whit Stillman be played out? Has he exhausted the upper middle class characters that peopled his work? Perhaps a trilogy is all he'll give us—but for even that, a new DVD release reminds us, we should be grateful.

As the nation at large has become more politicized—everyone self-identifies now as either red state or blue, it seems—so have movies. The major Oscar battles this year were dominated by smaller films with politically or socially charged themes, none of which could be labeled conservative or libertarian. But we are starting to hear more and more from right-wing voices in independent film. Unfortunately, few of them have found success. And they haven't concentrated much on the art of filmmaking—they tend to be hagiographies of the president or rebuttals of Michael Moore.

Stillman is different. He has more in common with French New Wave than with what might be his fellow travelers. His first film finally came out on DVD this spring and was re-released theatrically in the United Kingdom. "Metropolitan" was part of the big independent film movement of the 1990s. It garnered Stillman an Oscar nomination and led to two more films, "Barcelona" and "The Last Days of Disco." But Stillman's literate comedies examining the love lives of New York debutantes, patriotic Americans, and soon-to-be-yuppie disco fans couldn't be more different from the other quintessential films of the period, like Steven Soderbergh's steamy "sex, lies, and videotape"—or from the films many conservatives are making today.

The politics of the filmmaker aren't obvious (which is why his films are so enjoyable), but Stillman manages subtly to put forward his worldview. The subjects of his three films seem trivial at first glance—"Metropolitan" examines what might be the last debutante season, "Barcelona" follows Americans looking for love in Spain, and "The Last Days of Disco" chronicles, well, the last days of disco—but they're not. All three films take place at a time of important social change, for the protagonists and the world at large, and suggest how we might deal with it.

"Metropolitan's" setting, a title card tells us, is the Manhattan of "not so long ago." The film looks ageless: pop-culture references are nonexistent and the college students home for Christmas break wear timeless preppy clothes—turtle-neck sweaters and pearl necklaces. But Stillman has admitted the film is part autobiography; since he graduated from Harvard in 1973, we can safely put the timing in the late 1960s, a time of great shift in America, including the dawning of the sexual revolution.

The film's Upper East Siders seem to do nothing but attend deb balls and after-parties, but they're anything but shallow. Within the film's first seven minutes, they've debated the existence of God and discussed Thorstein Veblen and French utopian socialist Charles Fourier.

Tom Townsend is a follower of the latter and an outsider adopted by the group. Tom attended the same private schools as the others. But he lost his trust fund when his parents divorced and now lives (horrors!) on the West Side.

While Tom alternately criticizes and embraces his new friends, the group dissects itself. The intellectual Charlie and the wisecracking Nick, in particular, foresee the end of their charming way of life. "This will probably be the last deb season ever," is a refrain voiced throughout the movie. The world of debutantes and the escorts charged with the task of taking care of them—with all that implies—could not survive modern, egalitarian, post-sexual-revolution America.

"I think that we are all, in a sense, doomed," says the fatalistic Charlie. Charlie may be a bit obsessed with his class—an upper echelon soon to lose its privileges and lightly but lovingly mocked by the filmmaker. But he's not far off the mark. In a commentary track on the new "Metropolitan" DVD, Stillman remarks that he chose doomed places—stores that no longer exist, hotels with reputations no more—for his exterior shots. "It's really charming," Serena says in the film of the St. Regis. "Yes, they'll probably knock it down soon," Tom responds.

It's a trademark the filmmaker continued to use. In "Barcelona," frequent traveler Ted flies now-defunct TWA. Stillman always reminds us of the sometimes beautiful things we've lost.

One of the astonishing but rarely mentioned things about "Metropolitan" is that almost all its actors were first-timers. Stillman's second film, 1994's "Barcelona," gives two discoveries starring roles. Chris Eigeman (Nick) and Taylor Nichols (Charlie) play Fred and Ted Boynton, American cousins whose jobs have taken them to the Spanish city in, as a title card tells us, "The Last Decade of the Cold War."

Their characters are replicas of ones they played in the earlier film. Ted is the sales director of a U.S. outpost, uptight with a bit of a stammer, earnestly searching for a woman with whom to

spend the rest of his life. He's not particularly fond of his blasé cousin Fred, a naval attaché doing advance work for the fleet's arrival.

Ted tells Fred that the sexual revolution came late to Spain but left a deeper mark than it did in America. Fred's lover Marta might be emblematic. In one of the funniest lines of the movie, she says solemnly, "I think it's true that the height of the sexual revolution is over. I won't go to bed with just anyone anymore. I have to be attracted to them sexually." Fred seems perfectly happy with this state of affairs, calling his cousin a "prig" for even noticing it. "Did it ever occur to you that the world was upside down before and now it's right side up?" he asks his cousin, echoing a conversation in "Metropolitan" about Jane Austen. But when he catches Marta *in flagrante delicto* with another man, the hurt in his normally sarcastic face is palpable. While "Metropolitan" and "The Last Days of Disco" examine the effects of the sexual revolution on women, "Barcelona" shows that it can hurt men, too.

**STILLMAN'S DISCOTHEQUES OFFER, AS THE ENTHUSIASTIC JOSH SAYS, "COCKTAILS, DANCING, CONVERSATION, EXCHANGE OF IDEAS AND POINTS OF VIEW."**

Like many of Stillman's characters, Ted has looked to art for guidance on how to act in this brave new world: "The words to pop songs are the only advice we have on romantic matters. Most of it very bad." His search leads to perhaps the funniest scene in the movie. Hiding a Bible behind a copy of *The Economist*, he dances around his apartment to "Pennsylvania 6-5000" while reading Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. "What is this, some strange Glenn Miller-based religious ceremony?" Fred asks upon discovering him.

"Barcelona" explores the changing relationship between America and the rest of the world as the Cold War ended. But while this political dimension inspired the film's most drastic scene—Fred's shooting—Stillman is more interested in the changing relationships

between men and women. He cleverly uses the political as a parallel for the personal: Marta's declaration, "I think there is something fascist about a boy who immediately talks of marrying a girl he likes," is just one example.

"The Last Days of Disco" (1998) completes the unofficial trilogy but takes place between the two previous films, during "The very early 1980s." (Stillman likes those title cards.) A movie about disco might be unexpected coming from a WASP director like Whit Stillman. But "Last Days" is nothing like the higher-profile "Studio 54," which superficially dealt with the same subject. Stillman's discotheques offer, as the enthusiastic (actually manic) Josh says, "cocktails, dancing, conversation, exchange of ideas and points of view." Sounds rather like a deb party, doesn't it? Stillman's intelligent young editors, lawyers, and ad men talk as much as they dance.

Despite the seemingly fluffy subject matter, "The Last Days of Disco" may be Stillman's darkest film. There are no near-death experiences, as in "Barcelona." But

the consequences of the sexual revolution, explored to some degree in all three films, are ugliest here. Ted and Fred bumbled a bit on their way to happiness, but they found it, relatively unscathed. Even "Metropolitan's" Audrey seems self-assured compared to "Last Days" Alice (played affectingly by Chloë Sevigny), whose happy ending is much harder won.

Alice is pretty, smart, and ambitious. But the young college graduate has trouble navigating the post-Pill world. Her roommate Charlotte is no help. Jealous that Alice—unbeknownst to her—is so widely admired, Charlotte undermines her friend's happiness at every turn. Her worst advice is encouraging Alice to sleep with Tom, the guy she's liked since college. Afterward, Tom cruelly blows Alice off. "I was curious if the sexual revolution went as far as everyone said it

had—but emotionally I couldn't handle it. I got so depressed, but when I saw you that night, you were a vision, not just of loveliness but of virtue and sanity," he tells her. "But what I was craving was a sentient individual who wouldn't abandon her principles to hop into bed with every stranger she meets in a nightclub."

But Tom was Alice's first lover—and we find out later that during their one-night stand, he gave her both gonorrhea and herpes. The experience left Alice literally scarred for life. Charlotte's gushing remark to Alice in the club rings rather hollow now: "We're in complete control. Look down. There are a lot of choices out there."

The breakdown in mores Stillman explores has plenty of causes. But he posits one of the most interesting: art. In "Metropolitan," Stillman shows how art can be a moral guide—heroine Audrey's is Jane Austen. In "Barcelona," he hints at its sometimes destructive nature; popular music and "The Graduate" garner snide remarks. By "The Last Days of Disco," he launches an all-out attack. In an amusing, Tarantino-esque scene, Josh earnestly argues that the Disney cartoon "Lady and the Tramp" can "program women to adore jerks. ... Essentially it's a primer on love and marriage directed at very young people, imprinting on their little psyches the idea that smooth-talking delinquents recently escaped from the pound are a good match for nice girls from sheltered homes." One of the main themes of Stillman's trilogy is that art has the power to change us—for good and ill—if we let it.

Small, talky films featuring characters with a sense of catastrophe—Whit Stillman sounds awfully European, doesn't he? In fact, Stillman's work is a lot like that of the singular French director Eric Rohmer. Both are more interested in psychology than plot. Both have their self-absorbed characters sit around and talk about philosophy, while they face sexual temptation at every turn.

The men of Rohmer are just as indecisive as those of Stillman—Frédéric in "Love in the Afternoon," unsure if he'll

cheat on his wife until the last possible moment, is characteristic. But in the end, they must overcome their indecision, often with the help of the thinkers these people grappling with love and faith look to for advice. "My Night at Maud's" narrator wagers his life on Pascal.

Many critics compare Stillman to that most European director (in his dramas, anyway), Woody Allen. Stillman's neurotics might be the children of Allen's. But Stillman is still very American, and a much more optimistic New York chronicler than Allen. Stillman's films did get increasingly dark. But his work, happily, shows young people successfully navigating a space between tradition and what's come to replace it. The filmmaker isn't naïve enough to believe we can hold on to everything we're losing. Some social mores are lost forever. But neither must we give up. We can embrace life in the modern world—his conservatism is too sophisticated to ignore it—while not embracing everything in it.

Both Eric Rohmer and Woody Allen were incredibly prolific directors. It appears that Whit Stillman never will be. And, unlike them, he's abandoned the milieu to which he gave a voice and that made his name. His only completed project since "The Last Days of Disco" was an interesting "novelization" of the film that seemed to indicate Stillman hadn't yet finished his exploration of the "type" he made famous.

Perhaps his next movie will be a more overtly political film, in keeping with the times. *Little Green Men*, written by the son of *National Review* founder William F. Buckley, is a Washington satire on conspiracy theories that focuses more on politics than people. Based on the recent success of another Buckley adaptation, "Thank You for Smoking," Stillman might be making a wise move, monetarily. But those of us who revere his wise trilogy on love and art may be poorer for it. ■

*Kelly Jane Torrance is an arts and entertainment writer at the Washington Times.*

## BOOKS

[*In Defense of Hypocrisy: Picking Sides in the War on Virtue*, Jeremy Lott, Nelson Current, 193 pages]

### Private Vices, Public Benefits

By Daniel McCarthy

IN 1714, the Dutch-born, London-based pamphleteer and economic thinker Bernard de Mandeville stirred a scandal with his *Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, a work arguing long before Adam Smith that self-interest, not benevolence, was the motor of social progress. Indeed, the earlier writer went further, unashamed to call this self-interest by the names that generations of classical and Christian moralists had given it: vice, passion, evil. "What we call Evil in this World," he wrote, "...is the grand Principle that makes us sociable Creatures, the solid Basis, the Life and Support of all Trades and Employments without Exception: ... the Moment Evil ceases, the Society must be spoiled if not totally dissolved."

Some 200 years after Mandeville's death, novelist Ayn Rand built an empire, or at least a large and lucrative cult, by championing what she called "the Virtue of Selfishness." Wealth as well as fame was to be had from the transvaluation of values. Now comes a fresh effort to turn established morality on its head, an apologia for hypocrisy from the prolific young journalist Jeremy Lott. As any look at Americans' television habits or waistlines will show, this country has long since made its peace with sins like gluttony, lust, avarice, and pride. But hypocrisy, as Lott shows, remains a hanging offense in our mass culture, in politics, religion, and entertainment alike.

Lott begins with a case study: the hypocrisy of Bill Bennett, dubbed the

"Bookie of Virtue" by *The Washington Monthly* early in 2003 when the magazine exposed his high-stakes gambling habit. Over a decade, Bennett wagered away more money than most of us will make in our lifetimes—more than \$8 million by *The Washington Monthly's* estimate. But however unwise, even unvirtuous Bennett's gambling may have been, was he really, as his critics charged, a hypocrite? Not at all, according to Lott. Bennett himself had never condemned gambling. His church—Bennett, like Lott, is Roman Catholic—does not generally consider betting on games of chance sinful. Even Bennett's detractors didn't necessarily think there was anything wrong with his gambling *per se*. If there was any hypocrisy here, argues Lott, it was on the part of Bennett's critics, who would not normally publicize a man's recreational vices—if that's the right word—but made an exception for a political enemy.

So far, so droll: hypocrisy is not always what it appears to be, and the people who howl the loudest about it might themselves be guilty. But Lott next questions the very premise shared by accused and accuser alike in the Bennett affair—what's so bad about hypocrisy, anyway? Sounding like a modern Mandeville, Lott argues hypocrisy "helps to prop up moral norms and preserve useful fictions. And without those norms and those illusions, well, we'd have anarchy." Indeed, "it also provides a way for good men to pay lip service to heinous governments and warped social customs while working to thwart and ultimately undermine them. You see, hypocrisy is not *just* a necessary evil. It's also an engine of moral progress."

*In Defense of Hypocrisy* is a breezy, chatty book. The moral gravity of his subject doesn't weigh down Lott's prose. And if anything he errs on the side of brevity. In less than 200 pages, he touches upon the hypocrisies—real or perceived, virtuous or not—of politicians from Newt Gingrich to Howard Dean, celebrities from Britney Spears to Michael Moore, and institutions from public schools to the Roman Catholic

Church. At every turn, he raises more questions than he answers—which might be a Socratic strategy in an older author but in Lott's case leaves the impression he simply hasn't thought things through carefully enough to come up with firm positions. Though consistently thought-provoking, the book falls somewhat short of its promise: *Maybe Hypocrisy is OK Sometimes* would make a more accurate title. Lott's defense of hypocrisy is tentative indeed.

But there's no hypocrisy, for good or ill, about the book itself: Lott doesn't pretend to have written a scholarly treatise here. And he's not shy about calling on established authorities for help. To familiarize readers with the academic study of hypocrisy, Lott talks to Taylor University philosophy professor James Spiegel, who speculates that hypocrisy is almost universally condemned "because it's a double vice. It involves not just the indiscretion that one's covering up but also the indiscretion of the deception. Also, we despise the act that hypocrites justify themselves and often

profit by their deception, so there's a deep injustice here." Following St. Thomas Aquinas, Spiegel carefully distinguishes between "akratic" individuals who simply lack the moral strength to live up to their values—Darryl Strawberry is one example he gives—and true hypocrites who willfully transgress.

For insight into the Catholic Church's priestly pedophilia scandal, Lott turns to Philip Jenkins, professor of religious studies at Penn State and author of a

Rauch's own words, his Hidden Law "absolutely depends on hypocrisy. It not only depends on genteel hypocrisy, which is the preacher pretending not to be screwing the congregant, it depends on public hypocrisy, which is the people actually averting their eyes." "The people's hypocrisy in the case isn't ideal," Lott writes, "but it's probably less bad than the alternative of busting up a marriage and condemning the children to every other weekend with daddy."

## THERE'S NO HYPOCRISY, FOR GOOD OR ILL, ABOUT THE BOOK ITSELF.

book on clerical abuse. Lott's own take on the affair, tweaking a phrase of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's, is that it reflects "the soft tyranny of high expectations." While Lott finds that sexual misconduct by employees of public schools may dwarf the church's scandals, "the cases of abuse that are uncovered in public schools are not roped together as part of a larger crisis because people have come to expect and demand less from our schools. The Catholic Church, by contrast, has never really tried to disguise its moralism..." Here and elsewhere, Lott observes that one sure way to avoid charges of hypocrisy is simply to lower standards. That, he contends, is worse than hypocrisy itself.

Lott finds a powerful ally for this line of argument in one of history's most vociferous foes of hypocrisy: Jesus of Nazareth. Even as Christ reviled the Pharisees for what they did and failed to do, he nonetheless taught that what they preached was still to be heeded. "It's hard for people in this day and age to understand how Jesus could tell the crowd (a) that the teachers of the law were a bunch of brazen hypocrites, but that (b) the people still had to listen to them," writes Lott, "But, according to the book of Matthew, that's exactly what he did."

Yet that's no defense of hypocrisy. And so Lott looks to Brookings Institution scholar Jonathan Rauch, who argues for utility of social convention—what he calls the "Hidden Law"—over punctilious "Bureaucratic Legalism." In

This is the strongest argument, by far, the book makes for hypocrisy. But is it strong enough? One wishes Lott had invested more thought in the scenario. He doesn't consider the possibility that Rauch may simply be wrong: quite conceivably a woman being cheated upon and her children would all be better off knowing the truth. And might not others in the congregation, seeing what the preacher is able to get away with, follow his example? Yet if Rauch and Lott are correct, the implications might be still more problematic: would it follow that our institutions of religion, monogamy, and politics depend upon lies for their very existence? It's a conclusion that certain radical schools of thought, from ancient Cynics and early Stoics to latter-day nihilists, have embraced—though rather than accept hypocrisy, they rejected the social order.

Even before the Cynics, the place of convention—and by extension hypocrisy—in the social order was a point of contention between philosophers and sophists, some of whom held views not unlike Rauch's. Lott's book is not the place to turn for a discussion of this; indeed, he gets important facts wrong in his fleeting treatment of ancient philosophical history. (The trial of Socrates, contra Lott, was not a "show trial"—he was only narrowly convicted.) Nevertheless, *In Defense of Hypocrisy* is stimulating reading, a fun, if cursory, take on a subject that has engaged philosophers and prophets for thousands of years. ■

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[*A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846*, Boyd Hilton, Oxford University Press, 757 pages]

## Navigating the Age of Revolution

By William Anthony Hay

REVOLUTION AND WAR have defined the experience of most European countries from the mid-18th century, but Britain stands apart in having avoided revolution and fought its wars abroad. Britain's evolutionary narrative contrasts sharply with the story of other countries traumatized by revolution, civil war, or conquest and occupation. Europe's *ancien regime* faced a profound general crisis as institutions failed to meet demands they faced, and the French Revolution in 1789 marked the most prominent instance of a wider pattern. China followed a parallel trajectory with revolts that pushed it into a spiral of decline and vulnerability over the coming century. Even the fledgling United States faced challenges to its cohesion from the 1780s through 1830 that adumbrated the catastrophe of the 1860s. So what made Britain different?

Boyd Hilton offers a sophisticated answer in the latest volume of the New Oxford History of England series focused on Britain's perilous journey through the age of revolution. As a distinguished specialist in the history of finance and economics who has also written on the relationship between religion and public culture, Hilton is well placed to explore the period in context. His title draws on the famous description of Byron by his lover Lady Caroline Lamb—wife to the future Prime Minister Lord Melbourne—as “mad, bad, and dangerous to know.” Britain's elite at this time lived atop a fault line that threatened to produce the kind of earthquake seen in France, and the Whig cler-

gyman and wit Sydney Smith captured the spirit of the age when he remarked in 1840 that “the old-fashioned, orthodox, hand-shaking, bowel-disturbing passion of fear” underlay the political reforms of the era.

Instability went beyond fear of the mob. Technology and developments in industrial organization brought unprecedented growth, but cycles of boom and bust heightened risk and unease. Economic depression threw angry workers onto the streets without unemployment provision to prevent utter destitution. Change benefited some while leaving others dispossessed, and economic policy created a zero-sum game with political consequences. New interest groups in the provinces demanded a voice with greater urgency and challenged established interests with metropolitan ties. War with France from 1793, with the threat it brought of invasion and subversion, imposed heavy strains that peace after 1815 did not immediately raise. It shifted patterns of demand and investment while leaving a financial hangover of debt.

Hilton makes a strong case that the absence of a shared civic culture marked the defining characteristic of the age. At the time when public opinion first became a national phenomenon, neither the

tion of strength that collapsed in the crisis of the American Revolution, which undermined Britain's position in Europe and overseas—risking a defeat far worse than losing the 13 American colonies—and had serious consequences at home. Opposition Whigs led by Charles James Fox sided with the Americans, accusing George III and his ministers of trying to revive Stuart absolutism and subvert English liberties. Friends of the crown attributed the conflict to an alliance of infidels, religious dissenters, republicans, and Whigs seeking to overthrow kingly government. One Tory clergyman, William Jones, invoked the Puritan legacy by labeling the conflict “a Presbyterian war.” The anti-Catholic Gordon Riots in 1780, which caused more damage to London than the French Revolution later did to Paris, marked a symbolic loss of control. Repealing laws against Catholics in 1788 had aroused Protestant fears of foreign subversion and royal absolutism, and a crowd that had gathered to accompany a petition to parliament degenerated into a mob that sacked embassies and churches, opened the Fleet Prison, and terrorized London for five days. By 1783, George III had been forced to accept a coalition government led by Fox and Lord North.

Hilton describes the emergence of a

**THE ANTI-CATHOLIC GORDON RIOTS IN 1780 CAUSED MORE DAMAGE TO LONDON THAN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION LATER DID TO PARIS.**

public nor elites shared a common idiom for expressing it. Political, religious, and intellectual disputes cut deeply enough to create almost unbridgeable divides with opposing sides viewing each other as agents of anarchy or despotism. Rivalry between Whigs and Tories revived party politics, and religious dissenters clashed with defenders of the Church of England's authority. Some Englishmen sympathized with revolutionary movements abroad, but loyalists viewed them as an assault on Christian civilization.

Britain had emerged from the Seven Years War in 1763 with an enviable posi-

“new conservatism” as a backlash against these developments, but it might better be understood as the revival of older trends submerged by the Whig supremacy. England's landed interests and Anglican clergy had been politically marginalized until George III ended their exclusion in the 1760s. Tory squires and parsons, whose sentiments prefigured the militant loyalism stirred by the French Revolution, joined politicians like Charles Jenkinson to drive out the Fox-North coalition and install William Pitt the Younger as prime minister in 1784. Pitt's skill pushed the Foxite Whigs to the political wilder-

ness, and his financial policies revived British fortunes. Prosperity in Britain contrasted with the “political frenzy or dread of it” found across the English Channel—but war and revolution shattered that calm by 1793.

War strained Britain to the breaking point, with the compromise Peace of Amiens in 1802 providing only a brief pause between the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Ideological conflicts sharpened at home: Whigs and plebeian reformers alike labored under charges of being crypto-Jacobins or lackeys of Napoleon. The government rallied patriotic support, while its critics seemed to prefer foreign ways to those of their countrymen. If Britain ruled the waves, especially after Nelson’s 1805 victory at Trafalgar, seapower and commercial wealth could not defeat France in Europe. Forming a coalition against France proved futile until 1813, and Napoleon’s economic warfare combined with American embargoes damaged Britain’s trade. Unprecedented spending had wider consequences for public finance and the general economy. Even if a return to pre-war conditions could have been made after 1815, it would have created disruptions of its own. Any government policy hurt as many vocal interests as it helped.

#### **TORIES FEARED ENGLAND WOULD FOLLOW THE SORROWFUL PATH FRANCE HAD TROD FROM 1789 WITH THE MEETING OF THE ESTATES GENERAL.**

These tensions defined the postwar era. Lord Liverpool—prime minister from 1812-1827—whose reputation Hilton justly revives from obscurity, was painfully aware of the limits to what his government could do and relied on prosperity to solve the problems of social tension. His dismantling of mercantilist policies and the patronage networks reviled by critics as “old corruption” helped trade and deflected criticism, but reducing the patronage that made 18th-century government work smoothly presented more difficulties of management. Liverpool, the only prime minister to win a major war

and successfully handle peacetime crisis, stands out as a leading statesman of the era. The collapse of the Tory government after his untimely stroke in 1827 only underlines his achievement.

Where Liverpool found a solution in political management, his Whig counterpart, Henry Brougham, pioneered a new style of popular mobilization to break out of opposition. He linked provincial reformers and business interests with the Foxite Whigs in Parliament to force Liverpool’s government to abandon controversial economic measures such as the postwar income tax in 1816. Limited early success gradually forged a coalition for systematic reform that made the Whigs a viable governing party by 1830.

An avalanche of reform in parliamentary representation had begun in 1828 and 1829 with the repeal of laws excluding non-Anglican Protestants and Roman Catholics from political participation. Since representation in the House of Commons had been unchanged since the 1600s, the system became unbalanced as major towns lacked representation while declining villages had too much. Piecemeal changes in the allocation of parliamentary seats to reflect current population trends before long gave way to demands for a wholesale reform. Tories like John Wilson Croker feared England

strengthened the landed interest by giving more seats to the counties. Although the Reform era may have dismantled the structure of the ancient regime and displaced the paradigm of patrician culture that sustained it, Croker’s apocalypse never came to pass.

Reforms that standardized local governments and reorganized town corporations soon ensued. These developments involved a change within the political class following on the struggle for power between Whigs and Tories along with a perceived need to accommodate important groups beyond the old metropolitan elites. Chartism, a working-class movement in the late 1830s and ’40s, was a challenge to the new political class that never gained the traction to win or force concessions. Its demands for universal suffrage, annual parliaments, and payment for MPs had precedent among radicals in the 1810s but lacked middle class support. Hard times and unemployment gave Chartism working-class support, but that constituency evaporated with growing prosperity and meliorist social reform. Hilton also discusses at length the religious revival that brought a revolution in manners across society. Victorian respectability antedated Victoria’s accession in 1837, and it tamed that mad, bad, and dangerous people whose volatility posed such a threat.

Lord Shelburne likened Europe in the 1780s to the difficult period between winter and summer in cold climates where the spring thaw made terrain impassable. Society risked slipping into the morass created by perpetual change, and Shelburne lamented the failure to reconcile old institutions to new circumstances. Turbulence defined an era, but Britain, as Hilton’s fine book recounts, found its way through the storm to set the paradigm for modern, liberal government. Its story shows that evolution, not revolution, provides the surest path to a stable and prosperous order. ■

*William Anthony Hay teaches history at Mississippi State University and is the author of The Whig Revival, 1808-1830.*

# Not So Clean Break



Israel bombed southern Lebanon on July 12 in response to the capture of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah fighters. But the Israelis were said to

have planned a military campaign weeks before the soldiers were kidnapped. According to Dr. John Pike, head of the Washington-based think tank Global Strategies, and my friend Arnaud de Borchgrave, editor at large of the *Washington Times* and UPI, Israel had briefed Washington about its concerns, and the U.S. had given Israel a green light to attack Hezbollah and push its troops into southern Lebanon. There was an agreement between Israel and Uncle Sam that Iranian nuclear plants would eventually have to be bombed. Once this was done, Iran would most likely order Hezbollah to attack Israel. Thus the U.S. and Israel agreed in secret that at some point before the attack on Iran, Hezbollah would have to be disarmed and that as soon as a pretext became available, Israel should use force.

Elementary, my dear Watson. As everyone who does not live in a cave knows, whenever there is a glimmer of stability in the region, the state of Israel orders a targeted assassination. (Just before the Hezbollah kidnapping, there were targeted assassinations in Gaza.) On June 17, the former Israeli prime minister and chief hawk, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Likud Knesset member Natan Sharansky met with Vice President Dick Cheney. Speaking to the London *Spectator* recently, Netanyahu suggested that President Bush had assured him Iran will be prevented from going nuclear. I take him at his word. Netanyahu seems to be the main mover in America's official adoption of the 1996 white paper "A Clean Break," authored by him and American fellow neocons, which aimed to aggressively

remake the strategic environments of Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran. As they say in boxing circles, three down, two to go.

The trouble, of course, is that the three are not down. The U.S.-sponsored assault on Lebanon is looking a lot like the ill-fated Iraq invasion. In both cases we were told smart bombs would accomplish miracles. Not so. Stiff resistance on the ground and outrage throughout the world is the result. The Bush doctrine of creating democracy in the Middle East with bombs will go down in history as the cruelest and craziest ever. A war on terror, as Bush calls everything he doesn't agree with, cannot be won by a democratically elected government acting like a terrorist organization. Killing civilians, especially children, is wrong. As Talleyrand cynically pointed out, "It is worse than a crime, it's a mistake."

The truth is that even friends of Israel—and there are many—do not believe for a moment that Hezbollah, Syria, or Iran really threaten Israel's existence. Only a propagandist like John Podhoretz—"we should have killed many more Sunnis age 15 to 35"—and his bloodthirsty ilk of neocons believe such rubbish, and being a betting man I'd bet the farm that even they don't. Normal, decent, sophisticated countries that claim the moral high ground, as Israel does, do not kill thousands of civilians and destroy the infrastructure of their neighbors because three soldiers were kidnapped. It was a set-up from day one.

Both sides, needless to say, claim victimhood. The U.S. and its allies invoke

9/11, Madrid, and London. The Arabs underline 1967, 1982, 2003, not to mention Der Yassin in 1948 and last month's bombing of Qana. Yet we have three Arab territories today where American bombs and policies have played a major role in promoting chaos and mass death: Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon. Now we hear that the neocons want Syria and Iran to disintegrate next. Is there no one with any brains left in the White House? Don't any of them understand that if any means were acceptable to fight one's enemies, then the people who have bombed children in Israel and killed innocents at the World Trade Center would have been right? Not only were they morally wrong, we are doubly wrong to follow their example.

And speaking of lack of brainpower, isolating the Syrian ambassador to Washington cannot be the smartest thing to do. 18,000 Lebanese lost their lives when Israel attacked that miserable country in 1982, but Americans wonder why there are so many people who would spend six years building tunnels or sending suicide bombers. "We do not talk with terrorists" is the Bush mantra. He keeps repeating it like those mechanical monkeys who say "Howdy" one buys for children at a zoo. The collective punishment dealt out by Israel against innocents in Lebanon is bound to have repercussions. Netanyahu was and always will be a thug. The neocons ditto. The global loathing for the United States and Britain has helped corrupt the minds of a generation of young Muslims. Nightly scenes of slaughter and devastation on their television screens rouse them to blind bitterness against those they hold responsible—Uncle Sam and Israel. Is there no one to knock some sense into the morons who have turned us all into pariahs? This is America's nadir. ■

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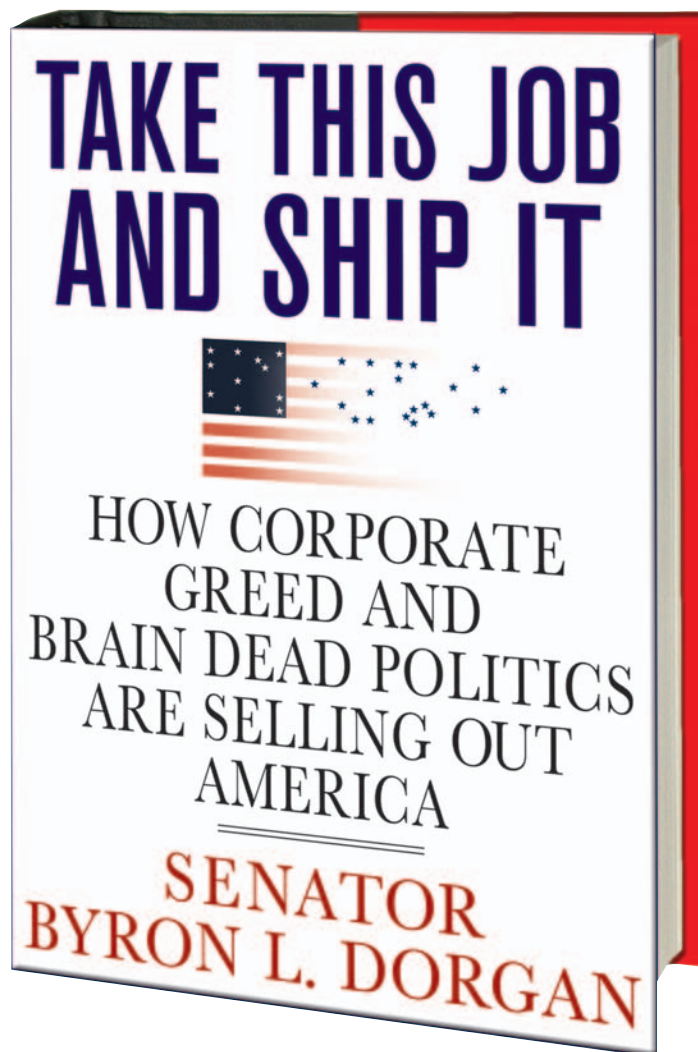
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